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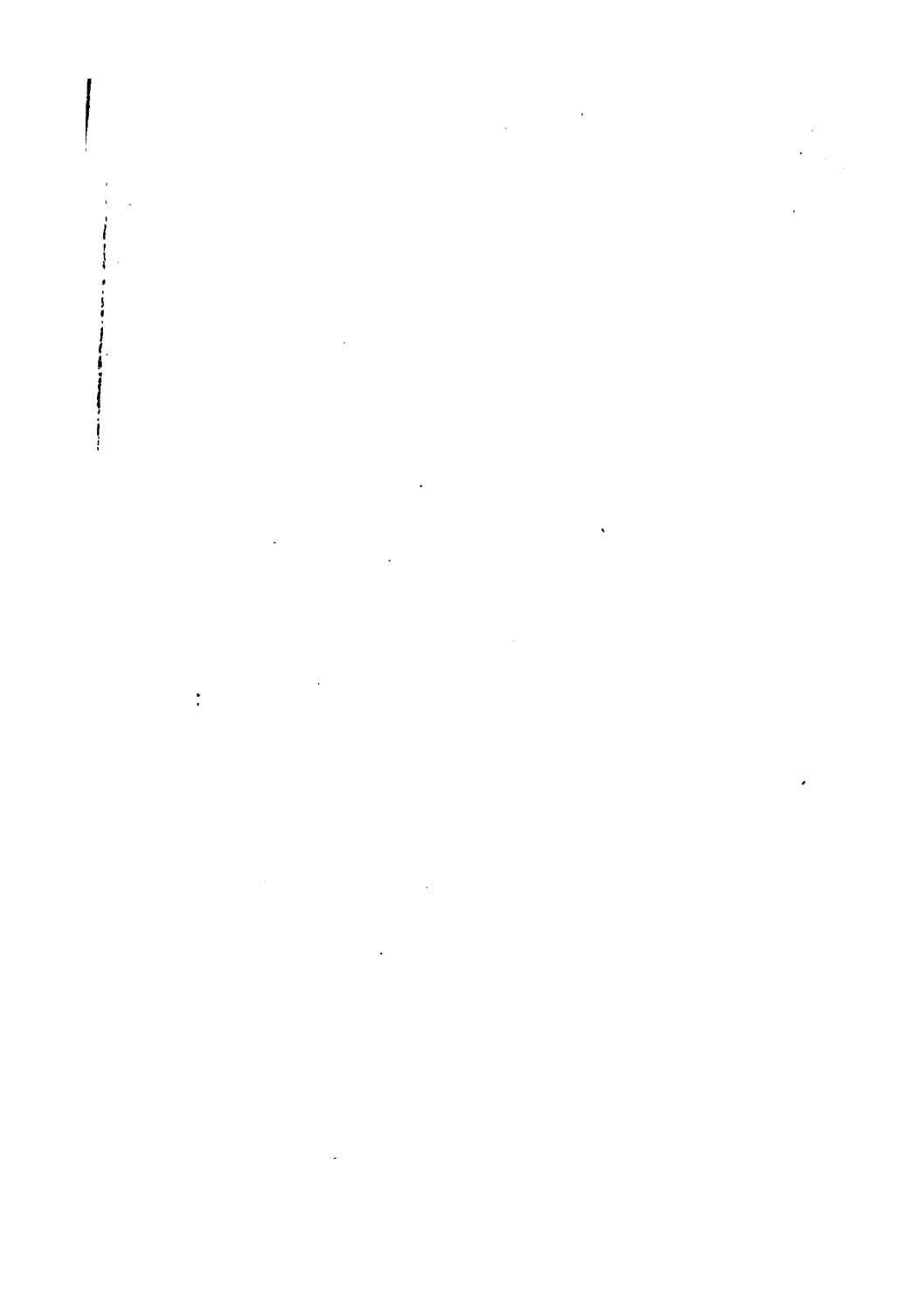
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AUNT JENNY'S

AMERICAN
PETS





MURRAY AND GIBB, EDINBURGH,
PRINTERS TO HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE.



BLUE JAY AND WHIP-POOR-WILL.

AUNT JENNY'S AMERICAN PETS.

BY

CATHERINE C. HOPLEY,

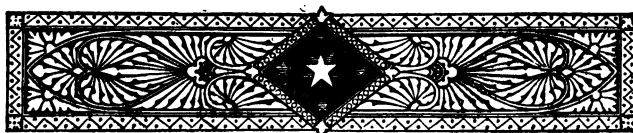
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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY E. NEALE.



LONDON:
GRIFFITH AND FARRAN,
SUCCESSORS TO NEWBERRY AND HARRIS,
CORNER OF ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD.
MDCCCLXXII.

189. g. 101.



CONTENTS.

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.	
THE MORTON FAMILY,	I
CHAPTER II.	
'WHAT IS SHE LIKE?'	6
CHAPTER III.	
A NEW COMPANION,	12
CHAPTER IV.	
HUMMING-BIRDS,	16
CHAPTER V.	
HOW A PAIR OF AMERICAN ROBINS BUILT A NEST, . . .	27
CHAPTER VI.	
MOCKING-BIRDS,	40
CHAPTER VII.	
MOCKING-BIRDS (CONTINUED),	48

	PAGE
CHAPTER VIII.	
NO MORE STORIES AT PRESENT,	58
CHAPTER IX.	
MORE ABOUT THE THRUSHES,	67
CHAPTER X.	
THE THRASHERS,	71
CHAPTER XI.	
MORE ABOUT THE THRASHERS,	85
CHAPTER XII.	
THE GHOST OF THE NESTINGS,	100
CHAPTER XIII.	
WINTER COME AGAIN,	111
CHAPTER XIV.	
A RAINY AFTERNOON,	125
CHAPTER XV.	
IN THE SOUTH OF GEORGIA,	135
CHAPTER XVI.	
THE FAMILY BATH,	146
CHAPTER XVII.	
A GREAT MANY RED-BIRDS,	159
CHAPTER XVIII.	
THE TINY YELLOW-BIRD,	170

Contents.

vii

	PAGE
CHAPTER XIX.	
REASON AND INSTINCT,	183
CHAPTER XX.	
THE WHIP-POOR-WILL,	192
CHAPTER XXI.	
SOME NOISY COUSINS,	201
CHAPTER XXII.	
ANOTHER GHOST,	210
CHAPTER XXIII.	
CONCLUSION,	218



Aunt Fenny's American Pets.

CHAPTER I.

THE MORTON FAMILY.

DUNCAN and Maggie Morton had been feeding their chickens and rabbits and doves, and coaxing the peacocks to eat from their hands, and dawdling by the pond, regardless of a frosty

December morning, to watch the muscovy ducks enjoying their dip, when they espied their papa coming out of the house, and ran across the lawn to meet him. Hosts of pets had these little Mortons ; never were there such children for live creatures. In-doors they had canaries, and bullfinches, and a goldfinch, and a linnet, and dogs, and cats, and a dormouse, and some white mice, and some goldfish ; out-of-doors they had more dogs, a pony, a hedgehog, a toad, a tortoise, poultry of all sorts, and nobody knows what besides. And everything was tame,—that was the delight of it. To bring home some fresh creature, bird or animal, and tame it, and make it do wonderful

things, and eat out of their hands,—that was the ambition and triumph of Duncan and Maggie Morton. And Freddy and the lesser Mortons—known as the nursery children—bid fair to add to the family menagerie, and do just the same, as fast as they got old enough. Mamma had given them a little play-room on purpose for all their pets. ‘For,’ said she, ‘their father was just the same when he was a boy ; and he thinks it teaches them to be patient, and kind, and gentle, and observing, to have all these live creatures to take care of.’ And in this respect I think very much as Mr. and Mrs. Morton did, for very amiable, intelligent children were Duncan and Maggie ; not the sort of children you meet with every day, though they had their faults like the rest of us. Only it is not in every house that room can be spared for a family menagerie !

But on this particular morning Duncan’s and Maggie’s thoughts were running quite as much on another subject as on their numerous *protégés* ; for an aunt whom they had never seen had lately returned from America, and was coming to stay with them. And it was holidays. Miss Bernard, their governess, had gone home till the beginning of February ; and these children did not quite know whether to be glad or sorry that a stranger was coming to be with them all that time ; neither could they quite settle with themselves what sort of an aunt this ‘American’ one was going to turn out. That she was the youngest of all their aunts, they knew ; but whether that were an advantage or not, they had not decided. So now they ran to meet their father, thinking that while they looked about the

place with him, as they often did after breakfast, it would be a good time to find out something more about this unknown aunt.

‘Papa, is Aunt Jenny a Yankee?’ Duncan began.

‘A Yankee! No, my boy; of course not. What made you think she was?’

‘Because when you came home last week you said to mamma, “Jenny is a thorough Yankee;” and you were telling General Erskine what a Yankee voice and what Yankee ways she has.’

‘So, in the same manner, we say of Miss Erskine how thoroughly French she is—merely because she has lived so much in Paris, and prefers French customs to English ones. Aunt Jenny was born at The Grange, you know, where Uncle Fred, and Uncle Percy, and Aunt Marianne, and the rest of us were born.’

‘Yes, papa; and that’s what made us wonder when you said she was American.’

‘She has spent so many years in America, and likes the country and the people so well, that she calls herself an “American;” and as she is engaged to be married to an American gentleman, she will, by and by, make that country her home.’

‘Shall we understand her when she talks to us, papa?’ asked Maggie. ‘Does she speak through her nose?’

Mr. Morton laughed ‘Ha! ha! ha!’ quite loudly at this, and said, ‘I am happy to tell you that your Aunt Jenny Morton does *not* speak through her nose. What else may you both please to ask?’

Maggie held coaxingly by her father's hand, and looking up in his face, said, 'Is she nice, papa? Shall we like her?'

'As to her being "nice," like sugar-plums or otto-of-roses, that I cannot possibly tell you; you must judge for yourselves.'

'No, I didn't mean that sort of "nice," papa; I mean, will she ——'

'When is she coming?' interrupted Duncan.

'To-morrow. I am going up to town to fetch her, and I hope she will like *us* well enough to stay all the winter. We must make Mortonfield very pleasant for her, and try to find out what *she* likes. That is the way to treat visitors.'

'I hope there will be a jolly good lot of ice, so that I can go out skating every day,' said Duncan, as he dug his heel into all the little bits of ice along the edge of the path, to see how thick they were.

But Maggie replied, doubtfully, 'I shan't know what to do to make it pleasant for her, papa. Perhaps she won't care about our birds and our dear little white mice, and all our other pets; and we *must* look after *them*, you know.'

The gardener coming up at this moment, and touching his hat, with a request to speak to his master about the stoves in the greenhouse, seemed to furnish an idea to Maggie; for as they turned to go with the man she said, 'If I thought Aunt Jenny cared for flowers, I would gather her some violets out of my garden. Do you think *she* would like them, papa?'

'Try her, Maggie ; try her. Suppose you were to put a little bunch in her room, and see.'

'Oh, but some out of the greenhouse would be best,' cried Duncan. 'Our violets are nearly all gone. Tell the gardener to cut some other flowers, papa.'

'Oh yes, papa dear !' Maggie exclaimed, catching her father's hand again. '*Let* gardener cut some for us, to put in Aunt Jenny's room. To-morrow ; tell him to-morrow. Do, papa.'

The gardener smiled good-naturedly, and hinted that a few of the 'house plants' might easily be spared for Miss Maggie ; and papa said, 'Well, we'll see about it,' and told her it was now time for her to run in, as her shoes were damp.





CHAPTER II.

‘WHAT IS SHE LIKE?’

MISS Morton, or Aunt Jenny as she was called, had been to the United States to stay with a brother who had settled there when Duncan was a tiny boy, just learning to run alone, and Maggie was a baby. Since then there were half a dozen little Mortons. Next to Maggie a baby had died, then came Freddy, and Ellie, and Percy, and a baby besides—six nephews and nieces at Mortonfield, whom Aunt Jenny was wondering quite as much about just then as they about her.

Miss Morton had gone only on a visit to America. It was just after the death of her mother, when her eldest brother took up his abode at The Grange ; but, once across the Atlantic, she had found so much to interest her, and so many new friends willing to detain her, that her English relatives had begun to think she was never coming back again. However, at last she had come, and had already stayed several weeks with her brother Frederick at her old home, The Grange, where our Mr. Morton (Duncan and Maggie’s papa) had been to see her.

Our young readers can now imagine with what curiosity the next afternoon the children watched, and, when it grew too dark to watch, how they listened for the carriage which was to bring back their papa and this stranger aunt; how, between whiles, they ran to look at the violets in the centre of the toilet pincushion, and at the pair of vases on either side—one arranged according to Duncan's idea, which he said 'looked the most natural,' and the other arranged according to Maggie's idea (flat and round in rings of colours, and with a frame of myrtle), which she said was 'the way gardener did them up for mamma when she went to parties;' and how they then looked about to see what else they could do, and then hurried off to ask mamma if she didn't think Aunt Jenny would like to have one of their canaries in her room? and where could they hang it?—how it was finally decided to place a little glass case of humming-birds on the writing-table instead, stuffed birds making no noise, and requiring no feeding. Then little Freddy was for bringing down all the bird-cages and mouse-cages and the squirrel-cage into the hall, so that auntie might see them the very moment she got inside the door; and this project being discarded, the children all held solemn counsel with nurse on the chances of Aunt Jenny's screaming at mice, and having headaches when the birds sang all at once. In the midst of this discussion they heard their papa's voice shouting, 'Aunt Jenny is here! Aunt Jenny is here! Come down, all of you.' And then the whole party descended—Duncan in leaps, by the aid of the balustrades; Freddy trying to imitate him;

Maggie more shyly, and waiting for Ellie ; Martha carrying Percy, and nurse carrying baby—each child, as it arrived at the bottom of the stairs, being caught in the arms of a lady, whom they could not at first see for the hugging and kissing she gave to each so fast, but whose voice seemed the sweetest and pleasantest they had ever heard in their lives ; and Maggie wondered how she could have had any doubts about understanding such a voice. Something there was in it like Aunt Marianne's voice, and yet something in it not English, though all the words were English. And when Maggie came to get a good look at her aunt, and found the face as sweet and pleasant as the voice, she next wondered how she could ever have had any doubts about liking her ; and at once decided that, as Aunt Jenny was so like a Yankee, what very delightful people Yankees must be !

‘She's jolly!’ echoed Duncan, when Maggie had imparted her ideas to her eldest brother. ‘*She* won't be afraid of old Podgie (the hedgehog) and our mice.’

Presently, when it had been fully decided whom baby most resembled, and nurse and Martha had retired with the younger children to the nursery, Aunt Jenny was to be shown up-stairs, when Duncan, Maggie, and Freddy quickly possessed themselves of her muff and shawls as an excuse to run before her, so impatient were they to observe the effect produced by the vases of flowers, and to see whether she would notice the case of stuffed birds—a recent present to themselves, on which they set great value.

But it seemed as if Aunt Jenny would never reach her room, so many things there were to stop and look at on the way. Here was the old oak cabinet that had formerly stood in the library at The Grange; there were some family portraits. What pleasure she took in looking about her, and recognising in this or that piece of furniture something she had known in the days of her childhood; and how happy was Mr. Morton in tracing a resemblance between his darling sister and some great-grand aunt or uncle hanging on the walls, scarcely finding utterance for his joy at having her again among them!

At last she reached her room, where the three children were officiously busy in 'putting away' Aunt Jenny's muff and victorine.

'Sniff, sniff, sniff. How delicious! What is it?' cried she the moment she entered, and looking round to ascertain whence the fragrance which she sniffed with intense relish. Espying the flowers, and pouncing upon the two vases: 'How lovely!' she exclaimed. 'How beautiful! And violets too! How kind to remember my tastes!' And by the way she looked at them; and then—on discovering who had placed them there—by the fresh hugs and kisses she gave to Duncan and Maggie, the latter thought it would not be very difficult to give pleasure to Aunt Jenny.

Glancing around with happy smiles at the signs of welcome everywhere meeting her eyes, she soon discovered the case of humming-birds, and immediately took it up.

'Ah, little beauties!' she cried. 'Just such as these are flying about the gardens in America all through the summer. Dunny, how would you like to go out with your butterfly net, and catch some of these lovely little birdies?'

Duncan thought this would be the very jolliest sport in the whole world, and became so frantic for his aunt to tell him about live humming-birds flying all over the gardens like butterflies, that Mrs. Morton was afraid he would leave his aunt no peace to unpack her things and get dressed for dinner, and proposed to send the children away. But Miss Morton begged that her niece Maggie might stop, the little girl being pleased enough to do so.

Duncan and Freddy, on leaving the room, exacted a promise that Aunt Jenny should not tell any more about the humming-birds until they could listen too; and though their sister agreed to this, you may be very sure she made the most of an opportunity to satisfy herself on certain other points, besides relating to her aunt the birth, parentage, and education of nearly every dog, cat, bird, and other pet in the whole Mortonfield establishment.

'Oh, Dunny!' cried she, hurrying off to her brother the very moment the dining-room door had closed upon her new friend—'Aunt Jenny loves birds and things as much as we do, and isn't the least bit afraid of anything. She had lots of pets of her own in America, and has promised to tell us all about them. And she will come with

us directly after breakfast to-morrow morning, to see where Podgie lives, and to help us to feed our chickens, and to —oh, I'm so glad Aunt Jenny knows about birds! Won't it be nice, Dunny?'

Miss Morton had found her way to the children's hearts at once.





CHAPTER III.

A NEW COMPANION.

AS Maggie had already discovered, the study and care of dumb creatures, and especially of birds, was a favourite pursuit of Miss Morton's; and this, with her willingness to answer questions as fast as they were asked, and her ability to give her nephews and niece many useful hints regarding the management of their own *ménage*, made them soon learn to look upon Aunt Jenny as one of themselves, and run to claim of her some promised help, or some amusing story, whenever there seemed a chance of securing her. And not one whit less ready than they was she. Greatly amused were Mr. and Mrs. Morton to see the children taking possession of their aunt each morning, as if she were a young girl of sixteen, and carrying her off with the three dogs to their gardens and poultry-yard and menagerie; and she, in spite of all her professed love for another country, proving by every look her thorough happiness in being again in dear old England.

But what delighted the children most, was to get Aunt

Jenny all to themselves when their papa and mamma had engagements elsewhere, and to hear about some pets of her own which she had reared in America ; particularly about the humming-birds, also a pair of mocking-birds which she had brought for Miss Erskine, promising the children should some day have another pair for themselves—the very difficulty of rearing and preserving them alive, rendering the young people all the more desirous to possess them.

Like these little Mortons, most of my young readers will prefer to hear of the beautiful birds, which in America are as common as the sparrows and swallows and finches of our English streets and hedges, rather than read whole chapters about the way in which Duncan taught his little white mice to run up a miniature ladder, and jump into Ellie's dolls' drawing-room chairs, and there sit and eat a nut ; and how the bullfinch drew up a bit of sugar tied to the end of a string ; and how poor old Podgie was coaxed from his hiding-place—rolling himself up into a prickly ball, if too much hurried—to help himself from his 'pantry,'—a certain corner of the rockery under some ferns, where a store of dainties was regularly deposited by the children.

Doubtless many who read this story have similar pets of their own, and by kindness and gentleness teach them to do equally amusing things ; so we will pass over the days spent in showing Aunt Jenny into every nook and corner of Mortonfield, and come to one morning just before Christmas, when Mr. Morton having a parish meeting to



CHAPTER IV.

HUMMING-BIRDS.

‘**W**ELL then,’ their aunt began, ‘try to picture to yourself the woods of Florida on a hot, a *very* hot, day in May. By that time the oaks and sycamore trees have great broad leaves, sometimes a foot in length ; and walnut trees, beech, birch, and ash ; pines, cedars, and other evergreens, vie with each other in the wealth and magnificence of their foliage. The lofty tulip tree and the giant magnolia, spangled with pure white blossoms as big as a dessert plate, fill the air with a delicious fragrance ; everything is alive with gaudy birds and insects, and all around you is shimmering and glistening with brightness. Even the leaves of most of the trees are smooth and glossy, glittering wherever they catch a ray of sunshine ; besides which, they are garlanded with brilliant flowers, and the whole wood is one vast nosegay.

‘Tell us the names of some of the flowers, auntie,’ Freddy requested.

‘They might only puzzle you, my little Freddy ; though

some of them you have in your gardens, and Duncan and Maggie may know their names. Some which are in your greenhouses I have seen wild in the woods of Georgia and Florida.

‘In England we seldom find gay flowers growing where trees shut out the light ; but in Florida so bright is the sky, so penetrating the sun’s rays, that under the thickest trees you find a perfect garden of flowers. And flowers, too, such as we are proud to have in our greenhouses. There the delicate sensitive plant trails along the ground ; its slender branches stretching a yard or two this way and that, may be traced by the tufts of pretty pink blossom which peep up from among the grass : there splendid phloxes, verbenas, cactus, the prickly pear, and a variety of lovely plants whose names you have never heard, flourish in wild luxuriance, and among them are some that climb to the tops of the tallest trees, where they throw out rich clusters of scarlet or purple blossoms.

‘Under the shade of one of these thickly leaved trees, and upon a pine which had fallen across a winding path of fine white sand, you must imagine us seated, fanning ourselves with sprays of great broad oak leaves, to keep off the crowds of insects.’

‘I would have sat down on the grass instead of the hot, dusty sand,’ Freddy observed.

‘The path was hard and well trodden, and we were safer there. In those hot countries the grass is so full of stinging insects and snakes, that it is dangerous to venture into it. Here and there an open space is formed in the

woods by several trees together having fallen, letting in a delightful current of air, but also plenty of dazzling sunshine. The pleasant breeze we are always glad to feel, and in the sunshine myriads of insects dance merrily.

‘Near one of those openings we were resting, watching with wondering eyes the brightness and the beauty of all around us, when among the insects dancing in the sunshine I espied what at first I thought was a particularly brilliant dragon-fly hovering over a flower. “What a strange, what a *beautiful* insect!” I exclaimed, pointing it out to my companions.

“That’s a *hum*-bird!” cried a little Florida girl, greatly amused at my ignorance; for to her they were such everyday objects, that she thought we all should know them.

“A humming-bird!” I exclaimed. And when I looked steadily at it, *yes*, I saw it was indeed a bird. There, in its full life and beauty, I delightedly beheld for the first time the lovely little creature with which already one seemed to be so well acquainted in stuffed collections. Soon we perceived another, and then another, as we all kept very still to watch them and to listen to the buzzing, humming sound produced by the rapid motion of their wings as they hover near a flower.

‘You have been looking well at those stuffed humming-birds in your glass case, and at the pictures of them in your natural history books, therefore you will not need that I should describe them to you. You know how very tiny is their form, decked with feathers as brilliant and beautiful as feathers can be,—now purple, now gold, now

green, now crimson, changing ever, yet ever flashing with the colours of a diamond in the sunlight. You remember their long pointed bill, made so conveniently to dip into a flower and sip the honey therein ; but there is something more which they have to help them procure this sweet food, and which is not so easily distinguished in stuffed specimens, and that is, a very long slender tongue, which, when still, is curled round within their mouths, but which they can dart out as quick as lightning to catch a tiny insect on the wing, or to dip deep down among the petals of flower for a drop of dew or honey. As we watched those wonderfully beautiful little creatures, which were more like flies than birds, we saw them flit from flower to flower, pausing now at this one, then at that one, but ever in the air, hanging, as it were, or floating upon it ; their wings beating—vibrating with a rapidity which rendered them almost invisible, their tail expanded like a fan. Thus they would hover —no doubt while examining the contents of the flower : suddenly, down dives the bill into the recesses of the corolla, but only for an instant ; then—away like a flash of lightning the birdlets are off to another ; dancing, dipping, and away again.’

As Miss Morton proceeded, becoming more and more animated, and gracefully accompanying her description with a movement of her hand to illustrate the diving, floating, or quivering actions of the bird, Maggie — devouring every word with breathless attention—here gave a great sigh to relieve her rapt feelings, and exclaimed,

'Oh, Auntie Jenny, it is *so* beautiful! It is exactly like one of my dreams, when all sorts of beautiful colours seem flying all over me as if—as if ——'

But Duncan could not have patience to hear what Maggie's 'ifs' were coming to, and cried, 'Oh, do go on, Aunt Jenny; you tell it capitally.'

'Just as a Scotch lassie in a Highland reel sets to first one partner and then another, dancing on and never tiring, so do the little humming-birds dance in the air, setting to first one flower and then another, darting their bill down into it, and flitting away again with a ceaseless activity and a swiftness of motion which you can scarcely follow. Occasionally you see them settle, but only for a moment; and as you watch them, you are filled with wonder to think how such tender, beauteous little creatures can support themselves in safety, shelter themselves in a storm, and protect themselves from enemies—since even beautiful little humming-birds have enemies. Yet their life seems spent in one joyous dance, and the Almighty has given to them a fearlessness not often found in much larger birds.'

Here Freddy was in a hurry to know if his aunt caught any of the wee birdies, and she replied, 'It is extremely difficult to catch humming-birds, on account of their exceeding swiftness of motion. With a butterfly net you may sometimes succeed; but, even if caught, it is impossible to keep them long in a cage, their peculiar mode of feeding on the wing rendering plenty of space essential to their existence.'

'Experiments have been tried by placing flowers inside a

cage, and there to entice them with sweets. Persons have succeeded in taming and preserving them alive for two or three months, but no longer. One lady devised a plan of dropping honey or syrup into some artificial flowers, with which she lined the cage ; but the poor delicate little creatures did not seem to understand such an untidy mode of feeding. Their dinner service, in their native woods, had been the golden goblet of the scented jasmine, the silver chalice of the lily, or the coral cup of the elegant cypress vine, with abundant space for their aerial dance between ; and anything less refined must offend their exquisite tastes.

‘ On the other hand, some naturalists inform us that humming-birds readily learn to sip sugar and water or honey from a cup in a room, and become tame and familiar when captured. Mr. Philip Henry Gosse—whose delightful books on natural history you must coax your papa to give you some day—informs us that in the West Indies he kept half a dozen humming-birds in a room for several weeks. “ If allowed the liberty of a room,” he says, “ they will become so familiar as to suck from a flower held in the hand, or even to take sugar from the lips.” ’

‘ The way I would do,’ said Duncan, ‘ would be to put lots of those kinds of flowers that have most honey in them in a good big room, with the windows wide open. Then the humming-birds would be sure to fly in ; and while they were getting honey, I would shut all the windows.’

Freddy seemed to think this a wonderfully clever idea,

and Maggie improved upon it by suggesting that the flowers—'growing ones in pots'—should be changed as fast as they went out of bloom, when the birds could be kept a whole summer, and perhaps might even make a nest, and lay some eggs. And 'would not that be capital?'

'Yes; I believe Mr. Gosse and others have tried that very plan, Maggie,' resumed Miss Morton. 'One can imagine that in a large airy West Indian apartment, where fragrant flowers no doubt abound, the tiny, fairy humming-birds might find pleasant pastime enough, and scarcely know that they were prisoners; but in a cage, if ever so large, their lightning-like motions must be constrained: and this, possibly, was the reason why the lady whom I mentioned did not succeed, in spite of her honeyed artifices.

'These tiny, delicate creatures are the animated gems of the fields and gardens where God has placed them. They are a living song, telling the wisdom and beneficence of their Maker,—an emblem of innocent joy in their gay life among flowers and their feasts of honey. Who could wish to fetter their brilliant wings, to check their busy activity, and to deprive them of the dainty food which Nature has spread for them in roses and lilies?'

'Are there no humming-birds in any other part of the world except America, Aunt Jenny?' asked Duncan; 'because, the other day, when you were reading some verses about them, you said the lady who wrote the verses had made a mistake.'

'The true humming-bird is found only in the New World; by which we understand North and South America, and the islands near. But there are some very tiny and wondrously brilliant birds in the hottest parts of Asia and Africa, called *sugar-birds*, *sun-birds*, and *honey-suckers*, and which so strongly resemble humming-birds that they have been often mistaken for them; and, next to them, are the smallest and most gorgeous of all the feathered tribes. They differ from our little favourite somewhat in form, in habits, and in their mode of feeding, always perching before taking honey from the plant, instead of sipping it on the wing, as the humming-birds do.'

'There are pictures of the *sun-birds* in the same book as the humming-birds,' said Duncan, 'and I thought they were all one sort.'

'There are about four hundred species of humming-birds, all of which are found in the warmer countries of the western hemisphere. They are also found in all the States of America, and in Canada in the middle of summer; but their plumage is less brilliant in those localities than in Florida and further south. Indeed, so truly are they children of the sun, that gradually as you approach under his scorching rays in the tropics, so does their plumage become more and more brilliant. They abound in the West Indies; and in Jamaica there is a peculiarly beautiful species, called "the long-tailed humming-bird," two splendid feathers of his tail being as long, comparatively, as those of the bird of paradise.

'All the prettiest names that can be thought of have

been invented for these exquisite little creatures, whose form is as varied and as remarkable as their colours. "Flashes of sunbeams," "tresses of the day-star," are what the savage Indians call them. "Jewels of ornithology" all agree that they are (ornithology being, as you know, the science or study of birds). And more than anything else they resemble precious stones, as you will allow; and are therefore called after them, as "ruby-throated," "emerald-breasted," "topaz," etc.'

The children now amused themselves in looking at the pictures in the *Naturalist's Library*, and in discovering resemblance between the humming-birds and some precious stones which they had seen, while Miss Morton went to look for the verses to which Duncan had alluded, and which are by Mary Howitt. Then she read the following:

'The humming-bird ! the humming-bird !
So fairy-like and bright !
It lives among the sunny flowers,
A creature of delight.

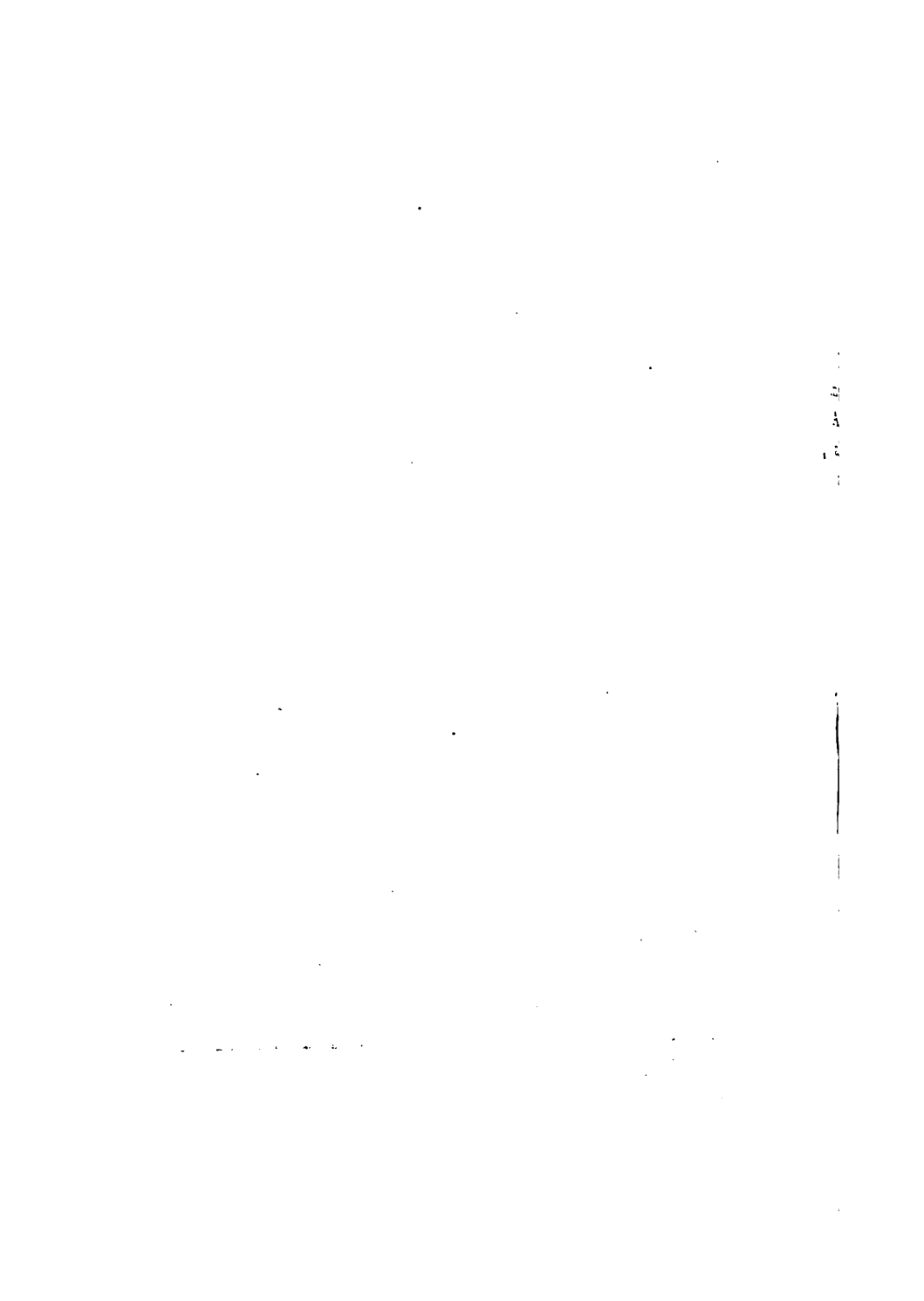
'In the radiant islands of the East,
Where fragrant spices grow,
A thousand, thousand humming-birds
Are glancing to and fro.'

('But these were "*sun-birds*" in the *East*, you must remember,' added Miss Morton in a parenthesis.)

'Like living gems they flit about,
Scarce larger than a bee,
Among the dusk palmetto leaves,
And through the fan palm tree.



HUMMING BIRDS.



'There builds her nest the humming-bird,
Within the ancient wood !
Her nest of silky-cotton down,
And rears her ancient brood.'

Here Miss Morton was interrupted by both boys wanting to know what sort of nest the humming-bird built, as Aunt Jenny had quite forgotten to tell them anything about that ; so Mary Howitt's verses were laid aside for a little more talk, which the young party much preferred.

'The nest of the humming-bird is, as you may suppose, of the softest and most delicate description, and very ingeniously constructed of matted lichen and *spider's web* ! Think of the exquisite skill of the little beak, and the gentle touches which can weave the spider's web into a lining for a nest. Then, besides, there are cotton trees, you know, and cotton plants in those hot countries, and other plants, whose seed-pods are lined with silky down, and this is what Miss Howitt alludes to ; and of these soft materials the tiny birds line their nests, which are supported on a mere twig, so small and light are they. Two wee, wee lily-white eggs are then deposited ; and in due time the diminutive birdlings appear.'

Duncan and Freddy again stopped their aunt to ask a dozen questions about these wee, wee creatures hatched from an egg scarcely bigger than a pea ; but Aunt Jenny was obliged to confess she had never been so fortunate as to see the young brood, and could only refer Duncan to his book again. 'But I quite agree with you, Dunny, that of all newly-fledged birds under the sun, a young humming-

bird must be, one would conjecture, the strangest morsel of animated life in the whole world. Would you not like to find a humming-bird's nest ?'

Yes, that he would, Duncan declared, Freddy of course echoing his words ; and both boys came to the conclusion, that as soon as they were grown up they should go to America and to the West Indies, for the express purpose of procuring humming-birds, nests, eggs and all, and bringing them home to rear in England.





CHAPTER V.

HOW A PAIR OF AMERICAN ROBINS BUILT A NEST.

AMONG the pets of these little Mortons was an out-door pensioner called Robby,—a certain robin who, with a numerous flock of sparrows, had become so well acquainted with the breakfast hour at Mortonfield, that the lawn outside the dining-room was literally alive with them about that hour, twittering and hopping to and fro for the crumbs which the children regularly threw to them.

This Robby became one day a subject of conversation between the children and their aunt, the latter being called upon to answer many inquiries concerning his relatives in the new world. Were the American robins the same sort of bird? Were they equally tame? Did the people feed them from their windows? What kind of nests did they build? And so forth.

Now it happened that, concerning robins' nests, Miss Morton had heard of a very remarkable one which had been made in the garden of some people she knew. So the very next time an opportunity presented itself of

satisfying the cravings of these young naturalists for 'stories,' Aunt Jenny related to them the following one :—

'But first I must tell you, my dear children,' she began, 'that the American robins are not like your little pet English "Robby," with his bright black eyes, and his plump round form, and his smooth red breast. My robins do not come hopping over the snow, with a beseeching chirp to ask for a breakfast of crumbs, or peeping confidently through the window-pane, as yours does.

'I do not think you would pronounce my American robins half so pretty and so winning. In the first place, they are much larger birds ; their form is less round, their eye less full and bright, and their breast is of a more dingy red.'

'Then I don't think they ought to be called robins at all, Aunt Jenny,' said Duncan.

'Well, Dunny, the truth is, that though called "robins," my pair claim no relationship with our English red-breast. They are of the *thrush* family—great, strong, resolute thrushes, who make up their minds to do a thing, and do it. But though their figure and dress be less handsome than the real robins, they might tell you they at least have a finer voice ; for you know that all the thrushes are distinguished for their great musical talent. Therefore, dear children, please remember that the Mr. and Mrs. Robin of this story were *thrushes*, after all ! The *migrating thrush* is their real name ; only, because they are brown birds with reddish breasts, and not speckled, and come peeping and prying about near to people's dwellings, they are

commonly called "robins" in the United States. Americans—many of whom have relations in England—love English names, and anything that reminds them of "the old country," as they call Europe.'

'Then, are there no real robins in America, Aunt Jenny?' exclaimed Duncan.

'Yes; there is a very large family of real robins, who, though they have not red breasts, claim cousinship with our winter pet. Most of the real robins are decked in even gayer plumage than our English robin, yellow and blue being very favourite colours of theirs. Some are brown, with yellow breasts and yellow caps; some have yellow wings and tail; or brown, with blue, white, grey, or black feathers about them. You would admire the real robin of America, I am sure; though now, perhaps, you would rather hear about the pair of red-breasted thrushes who are the robins of this story.'

'Yes, we should. Tell us about the yellow ones afterwards,' said little Freddy.

'Well, then, my American "robins" lived in Maine; which, if you will look at your map of the United States of America, you will find is a large State far up to the north-east, on the Atlantic coast. In the winter it is a very cold State; therefore Mr. and Mrs. Robin and a host of their relations, who all loved warmth and sunshine, went away every autumn to one of the warmer States far to the south,—perhaps to Texas, or to Mexico, or to one of the West India Islands; I am not sure where exactly. But remember they are *migrating* birds; that is, birds who

fly away to other countries for a season and come back again.'

'How do they know where to go?' Maggie inquired.

'God has given them this wonderful power of finding their way thousands of miles across land and sea and back again. *Instinct* that power is called; and sometimes instinct seems superior to reason, for neither you nor I—who both have the gift of reason—could find our way without a guide, far, far away to a distant country which we had never seen,—straight to it through the pathless air and back again: could we?'

'No; that, indeed, we could not,' replied the children.

'Did they always come back to the same place again?'

'Straight back to the very same village in Maine, and the very same tall old pear tree in the orchard where they had reared their brood the year before. And the same wonderful instinct that guided them there, told them when it was time to set about making another nest for another young brood.'

'How very wonderful of them!' exclaimed Maggie.

'What sort of a nest was it?' Duncan asked.

'In the selection of materials for their abode our Mr. and Mrs. Robin were not at all particular. A good strong nest they had determined to build—one which would stand a good deal of blowing about in that high tree, for there are terrible hurricanes sometimes over there; and as our robins had a wonderfully clever way of sticking things together with a kind of cement they made for themselves, few things came amiss. Bits of paper or string or rag

they would fly off with ; and sometimes you might have caught them upon the clothes-line, tugging away at the tapes and fringes of garments hung out to dry.'

'Oh, what fun it would be to see them getting a string off nurse's flannel petticoat !' exclaimed Duncan.

'Nursey might not think so ; for with this pilfering propensity, those American robins are not such very great favourites with the farmers' wives ; and indeed, as regards thieving and impudence, the American robin is almost as bad as the English magpie !

'But they are clever birds, for all that ; and very ingenious nest-makers, as you will see.'

'It was spring, lovely spring, when the flowers begin to "appear on the earth, and the time of the singing of birds is come ;" when the sun is warming everything into life and activity ; when little tender insects creep forth from their winter hiding-places, and all nature is busy. And one day, —just such a day as when you run to look for violets and primroses, and cry, "Oh mamma, do let us 'garden' to-day !" (the verb *to garden* having been invented for your express use), and "Do let us leave off this winter dress ;" and when everybody is too busy and too happy to think of the fire, which goes out without leave, and has to be lighted again in the evening,—on just such a day all the people who lived in Maine were quite as busy as the birds and insects in making their houses ready for summer. Now the ladies in Maine are very active and industrious ; and even if they live in fine large houses, they bring up their daughters to be very useful, and to do a great many

things for themselves, which English ladies would leave for their servants to do. Perhaps because they cannot always meet with honest and tidy servants, they get into the way of *doing for themselves whatever requires to be done well*. A very good way it is too; and no one in Maine thought the worse of people who did this.

‘So, on that bright spring day, the lady who lived in the house adjoining the orchard, in which was that great high pear tree, said to her daughters, “Now, girls, this is just the weather to bleach our muslins, and do up our best laces. And I will do up my court lace ready for Mattie’s wedding.” The young ladies were quite of this opinion; and they forthwith hunted up all their fine-worked collars and laces and embroideries, and popped them into a wash-tub, where they underwent a good soaping and soaking, and were then spread out in the sunshine upon the fresh, green lawn.’

‘Instead of hanging them on lines?’ Maggie inquired.

‘Well, by letting things of this kind lie all day long in the bright sunshine, they become beautifully white and clear. Among those fine laces and muslins was some of the choice old lace which the lady called her “court lace,” because it had belonged to an ancestress of hers who wore it at the court of the English King George III. Beautiful point lace it was; and the lady prized it exceedingly—wearing it only on such occasions as the one for which she was now preparing, namely, *a wedding*. Nor would she ever trust any one to wash it and iron it but herself—not even her daughters. So the court lace was spread out

with the rest upon the lawn, where it would be quite safe all day ; and just before sunset the young ladies went with a basket to gather up all the fine collars and laces and bring them in. One by one each piece was picked up and placed in the basket, the sisters singing and chatting merrily all the while.

‘ But when the lady herself came to examine the contents of the basket, she missed some of her much-prized lace ; and after turning the things over and over in a great flurry, she cried out, “ Why ! daughters ! why upon earth have you left my longest piece of point out of doors ? Run, Milly, and fetch it in right away.”

‘ Milly and her sister both declared that they had brought in every single scrap of lace.

‘ “ That can’t be,” said their mother, “ for my very best piece of court lace is not here.”

‘ Then they all three hurried out to seek for it ; and nothing would satisfy the lady but that she must go over every foot of ground herself—the lawn and the gardens, and even the orchard—to hunt for it. Being unsuccessful, she returned to the basket and examined each article over again, while the young ladies ran and searched in every drawer and box throughout the house, thinking that their mother might perhaps be mistaken, and had not brought down that piece after all. When it could nowhere be found, all they could do was to stand and stare at each other in a puzzled manner, exclaiming, “ Well !”

‘ “ Three yards of my royal court lace !” cried the lady, striking her forehead as if to make sure it told her the

truth. Yes! She remembered perfectly well how she had examined it while laying it to soak. The loss of it was all the more perplexing, because the house stood by itself in a very quiet place, and no one had been near them all that day, neither had there been any wind to blow the pieces away, nor any dogs or other animals to create mischief. Only Bridget, the Irish maid-servant, was at home; and though Bridget had hitherto borne a good character, the lady and her daughters now made up their minds that she must be the thief. And so poor Bridget, in spite of her tears and protestations, was turned away.'

'Then, didn't she take it?' cried Maggie.

'Wait a little.—So the spring passed away, and Cousin Mattie's wedding-day came, but the royal lace could not be worn, for it had never again been seen. And you may be sure the lady never ceased to mourn the loss of it.'

'But, auntie,' said little Fred, 'I want to know about the robin's nest.'

'Yes, Aunt Jenny,' added Duncan; 'you began about robins' nests, and then went off to washing lace, and such stuff; and I've been waiting all this time to know if they did make any nest, or whether the old birds were taken in a trap.'

'Why, they built their nest and raised their brood,' returned Miss Morton; 'and they feasted like princes upon the fine juicy pears, and sung their sweet songs of joy and gratitude, and no one thought at all about them.'

'And the buds of spring burst into the flowers of

summer, and the flowers of summer shed their bright petals and turned to seed, and the rough winds of autumn once more stripped the tall trees of their leaves, when Mr. and Mrs. Robin, and their large family, and all their relations flew off again to pass the winter where no bleak winds would molest them, and where the trees are ever green.

‘And about that time the lady’s little grandson came to visit her in Maine,—Franklin, or Franky he was called; and his own home being in the city, his great delight now was to be scrambling over the fields, jumping ditches and fences, and climbing the trees to hunt the squirrels, to the infinite terror of his grandmother.’

‘Wouldn’t I like to get some of the squirrels too!’ cried Duncan. ‘Go on, Aunt Jenny, please.’

‘One day, when this boy had climbed nearly every tree in the orchard, his grandmother found him gazing intently at something in the tall old pear tree, the stem of which was so straight and even for some distance from the ground, that he had never ventured to climb it. “I can’t think what that is up in the tall pear tree, grandma!” said he. “I’ve seen something waving about up there, which I believe is a part of the tail of my kite that I lost here last summer. I’ve half a mind to climb up and see.”

“Oh, nonsense!” cried one of his aunts. “Now, Franky, don’t, pray, be trying to climb the big pear tree after such rubbish. You never can get up there. We shall have to send you home to your mother with a broken back, if you don’t take more care of yourself.”

'His grandmother said an old kite's tail was "not worth risking his neck for," and wished he was "not so fond of climbing."

'But Franky's passion for bits of string was equal only to his love of adventure. Besides, he longed to know the fate of that dear old kite of his, and many a wistful glance did he cast up to the bare branches of that great old pear tree. Had it not been so difficult to climb, he would have been up long ago. One day, when his curiosity could hold out no longer, he lugged a ladder to the foot of the tree, and up he scrambled, like the very squirrels themselves, from whom indeed he seemed to have taken lessons.

'Meanwhile his grandmother and his aunts espied him, and rushed out, screaming, and coaxing him to come down. Franky, however, intent upon that precious remnant of his favourite kite, was deaf to their entreaties, except to cry "All right, grandma!" and higher and higher went he.

"Hurrah! a last year's robin's nest I've found," shouted Franky, as he neared the prize. "Why, here's a go! I never saw such a funny nest, grandma. Aunt Milly, 'tis made up of lace and glue."

"Psha! What do you want with a last year's bird's nest, Franky?" returned Aunt Milly. "Now *do* come down, before you break your neck."

"Lace it *is*, grandma!" cried Franky, as he stretched out his arm for the prize. "'Tis real lace, like what you wear, grandma,—that thick kind, like what you gave Ma

once. 'Tis all stuck together, except this long end; and it ain't my kite's tail after all!"

"Lace! lace!" cried the ladies below, when Franky persisted in this strange story. "Lace!"

"Oh!" then screamed his grandmother; "girls! my Brussels point, you may depend! My beautiful royal lace! Then the robins flew off with it! Who'd ever have thought of such a thing?"

'I guessed it all along,' exclaimed Maggie, clasping her hands, and fairly dancing on her seat with delight. 'I guessed it. Go on, go on, *dear* Aunt Jenny. Did he take the nest?'

'Yes; and his grandmamma was now just as desirous that he should do so, as before she had objected. She was chiefly afraid that he would injure it. "Now do mind what you are about, Franky. Do be careful how you loosen it," the ladies cried out. "Be sure you bring it down safe."

"Aha! Now, grandma, aren't you glad I came up here?" exclaimed Franky exultingly, as he carefully detached the costly nest, amid the divided fears and rejoicings of his grandmother and aunts.'

'How pleased they must all have been!' cried Maggie.

'Yes, indeed they were all glad when he reached the ground in safety, nest and all. A veritable robin's nest it was, with twigs for its framework, and a yard and a half of Brussels point lace matted together with moss and straw for its lining, just as Franky had said. Mr. or Mrs. Robin had flown off with that long piece of thick lace;

but not having required the whole of their plunder, and fortunately being unable to divide it, they had left more than a yard of it hanging, which, amongst the thick leaves of summer, could not be seen, but which now, as it waved among the bare branches, became not only a signal of their skill, but one which led to the recovery of the prize.'

Maggie here became all impatience to know if the lace were good for anything; Duncan being of opinion that it must have been completely rotten.

'By the end of the winter it would have been; but, to the joy of the ladies, the lace—strange to tell—was not very seriously injured as yet. To be sure, it was anything but white; but fresh soaping and bleaching soon brought it to its colour again; and grandmamma prized it more than ever.

"For," said she, "before the winter is over, it certainly would have been just good for nothing!"

'There, dear children,' continued Aunt Jenny, 'now I have told you all I have to tell about these robins, who were so happy in their curious and costly dwelling, and so unconscious of the trouble they had caused.'

'But weren't they sorry they had sent away that poor Bridget?' asked Maggie.

'Ah yes. There is one thing more belonging to my story, which I am sure you will be glad to know—and that is, poor Bridget was immediately sent for to her place again; and glad enough to come back she was, for the lady had always been a kind mistress to her, and was now

very anxious to make amends to the poor girl whom she had accused unjustly.

“My dears,” she said to her daughters, “these robins have taught us a lesson. We mustn’t be so ready to think evil of our neighbours. And we must be very careful how we tax anybody with doing wrong, unless we can bring proof against them. I shall not forget those robins.”

‘And I shall not forget them either ; shall you, Dunny?’ exclaimed Maggie. ‘It was such a very funny thing to line a nest with.’

‘Now tell us another story, Aunt Jenny,’ said Freddy, who was quite as much interested as the elder children, and seemed in no haste to depart.

‘Oh, but not to-day, Freddy,’ cried Aunt Jenny, laughing. ‘If we tell all the stories in one day, what shall we do the next time papa and mamma go out to dinner without me?’

It was not long before another opportunity occurred for resuming the bird stories ; and Aunt Jenny, being ever willing to amuse her nephews and niece, assembled them in her own room one afternoon at dusk, to give them the promised account of the—



CHAPTER VI.

MOCKING-BIRDS.

AS you liked the story of the red-breasted thrushes and their nest of costly lace, I will now tell you something about the other kind of thrush, or mocking-birds, of which you have already heard me speak. It is a pair of mocking-birds, you know, that I have brought for my friend Miss Erskine ; and some of these days I shall hope to procure some more to send over to England, when you shall have a pair for yourselves.

‘You already know that all the thrushes are remarkable for their powers of song ; but of the whole family, none so much so as those of which I am now going to tell you. Naturalists call the mocking-bird the polyglot thrush, which means the thrush of many sounds or languages. Have you ever heard of the Bible called the Polyglot Bible?’

‘Yes, auntie,’ answered Maggie promptly ; ‘one with references all down the sides, and with some funny marks and figures to find out texts by : we’ve got one of them in the schoolroom. Miss Bernard says it is called a poly-

glot Bible, because it is written in many languages. But I could not make out what she meant ; because my polyglot Bible is all in English, except a few words, and the references, and the funny marks in the margins.'

'So yours *is* all in English. But it is the English copied from one particular Bible, called the Polyglot Bible,—a very large and curious old book, with each page divided into several columns side by side, each column in a different language. You are wondering what the Bible has to do with the mocking-thrush ; and Freddy looks as if this is "lessons," instead of story-telling. But have a little patience, and I think you will find it will help the story, and will help you to remember a rather puzzling word.

'You know that, in the first place, Bibles were not written in English, but in the languages of the East,—where those who wrote them lived,—Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Arabic, and other Oriental languages. And in order to obtain the true and correct meaning of the word of God, learned men of different countries have from time to time taken immense pains in studying out and in translating the Holy Scriptures from those different languages, and in selecting the best of these translations, and printing them side by side in those large and curious polyglot Bibles, so that people may compare them conveniently ; and it is the English part of these great books which has been chosen for *our* Bible,—the one with marginal references, which you use, and which has in consequence, sometimes, though incorrectly, been called a polyglot Bible.'

'But, dear Aunt Jenny, now I don't see why a thrush should be called like a Bible,' Duncan remarked.

'I did not mean to say that the thrush is called like a Bible, Dunny; but you can understand that as a polyglot book is one which tells the same history in many languages, a polyglot thrush is a thrush which sings the song or language of many birds. Therefore naturalists call it the polyglot thrush. Indeed it imitates almost every sound it hears, and from its facility in doing this it is also called the mocking-bird.'

'I see now,' returned Duncan. 'That great big Bible has the language of lots of different countries all in one cover, and the mocking-bird has the songs of lots of different birds all in one—all in—in——'

'In a bird with feathers for a cover, instead of a book with leather for a cover!' exclaimed Maggie, elated with the success of these comparisons. 'A live book! Oh-h! I understand exactly what polyglot means.'

Not exactly 'like a book,' however, were the children's definitions, but their ideas on the subject were clear, and that was enough for their aunt; while little Freddy evidently thought they were never coming to the birds, for he only said, 'How I *do* wish I could see a mocking-bird! Is it pretty, Aunt Jenny?'

'It has not a brilliant plumage; yet you would be sure to think it an exceedingly pretty bird, on account of its elegant shape, and its sprightly, graceful movements, so full of vivacity and intelligence.

'It is of a paler brown than many of the thrushes,—a

sort of ash colour, with a lighter and softly shaded breast, and not speckled. It has some tiny streaks about the head and eye which give it a bright look, and it has white in the dark quill feathers of its wings. It has also a most beautiful and intelligent eye ; and as when captured young it becomes easily reconciled to a cage, this bright and beautiful eye is ever on the watch for you, the bird quickly recognising your voice or your step, fluttering his wings, and peeping round expectantly as he utters his sweet "twe-et," "twe-et," "twe-et," with such evident pleasure at your approach, that it is impossible not to love him.'

'I know *I* should love him dearly !' cried Maggie. 'Is that the way yours did ?'

'Yes ; and the little rogues knew my voice and my step, and even my dress ; for if they caught sight of a bit of my flounce through the window, they would call and fidget until I went to them.'

'That's as Bully does to *me* !' again exclaimed Maggie.

'Are mocking-birds common ?' Duncan asked.

'In all the warmer States of America they are—migrating north or south, like the other thrushes, according to the time of year, but never venturing so far north as where their saucy cousins, the red-breasts, flew off with that costly lace. In Virginia we used to listen for the first song of the mocking-bird with the same sort of pleasure which in England we feel on the arrival of the cuckoo or the nightingale. The Americans sometimes call the polyglot thrush "the *English* mocking-bird," because its song somewhat resembles that of our nightingale and sky-

lark, there being no nightingales in America ; but there is a fulness, a richness, and variety in the song of the mocking-bird, not combined in any other bird in the world.'

'How long will it be before we have some for ourselves ?' asked Maggie, who desired more than ever to possess a pair of these charming songsters.

'I do wish you had brought us some, Aunt Jenny,' added Duncan.

'My darlings, you will hear what difficulty I had in saving even the two I brought over. But now I find that you are really able to take care of birds and will not neglect them, I shall do my very best to procure some to send you when I go back to America. It is not surprising that you should be a little impatient to possess some ; for even in America, in the warm States where they are so numerous, and in country places where they can be heard all day and all night, the people are not satisfied without having them in cages too, such universal favourites are they. But they are so exceedingly difficult to rear, that those persons are fortunate indeed who manage to bring them through their first winter. This is why they are so seldom met with in England. For a full-grown one you would have to pay a very large price.'

'How much ?' Duncan asked.

'Several guineas, perhaps. In New York they are worth from one to twenty-five or thirty dollars, according to their age, sex, and accomplishments ; while in their native place you must give at least fifty cents for one able to feed itself, and several dollars if they have learned anything.'

‘But how much is a dollar?’ Freddy wished to know.

‘Yes; and how much is fifty cents?’ added the other two.

‘Oh, I forgot! That is American money. In English, then, from half-a-crown upwards, according to the difficulty of procuring them.’

‘And are they tame?’

‘Yes; so tame and attached do they become when petted, that I have known them trusted to leave their cage and fly about the house when all the windows were open. A mocking-bird belonging to a lady in New York was allowed to pay an almost daily visit to another lady across the street during the summer weather, flying to and fro, and coming at a call, sitting on the finger or on the window-sill, and fluttering his wings with delight as he poured forth his wealth of music far and wide. Such a one as that would be worth several guineas in England.

‘Though so gentle and confiding when tamed, mocking-birds are, in their wild state, exceedingly bold, and even fierce, in defending themselves and their young. Several of them will sometimes unite their efforts to attack, it may be, a snake curling itself among the branches, a cat, or some other intruder, and by their combined and vigorous pecks effectually disable or drive off the enemy.

‘Having a peculiar dislike to being disturbed, you would think these little birds might choose a tree or an evergreen bush out in the thick woods for their nest. But no: they must needs build it quite near to a house, perhaps in an arbour, or in a fruit tree close to a path, and

then betray it to every one who passes, by a foolish manner they have of flying out and about it, uttering an ugly and angry sort of screech ; and if you dare approach too near, flying at you and dashing into your very face. Owing to this indiscreet anger on the part of the parents, it is no difficult matter to discover a mocking-bird's nest ; and then, if you wish to secure the young, you must beg and bribe all the negroes not to molest it. For when I was in Virginia, all the servants and labourers on my friend's estate were negro slaves, whose children, I grieve to tell you, from not having been taught better, would maim and destroy young birds from sheer love of mischief and torturing.'

'What did they do?' cried Duncan.

'It would make you unhappy and uncomfortable to think of what poor little birds were made to suffer by the untaught and thoughtless little negroes ; who, being too young to work, were left to pursue all manner of mischief. When I was there, these poor, miserable children were slaves, and by the laws of the country were not permitted to learn to read even their Bible. Now, thank God, they are no longer slaves, and are being taught all good and useful employments ; and by feeling the blessings of kindness and humanity towards themselves, they will, let us hope, learn also to be tender and merciful to the dumb creatures in their power. But now, as the best means of informing you of the nature and disposition of this species of thrush, I will give you the history of the two little mocking-birds which I brought from Virginia for Miss Erskine,

though these were not the first of the kind which I had reared.

‘They were hatched in an apple tree, their nest being on one of the lower branches, where it could be easily reached ; and for fear of the negroes, who in spite of their promises were not to be trusted, I was obliged to keep a strict watch over the young birds, and visit them several times a day, even at the risk of having my eyes pecked out by the much affronted parents. The fledgelings made rapid progress, and one day seemed to have grown so suddenly strong and bold, that when I put my hand into the nest, out they all hopped, scrambling to the distant branches, and chirping in a truly defiant manner. Before evening they would have flown. “Oho, little birdies ! It is quite time *you* were secured !” cried I ; and soon enough two of the four were lodged in a large old cage, the other two being left to console the parents.’





CHAPTER VII.

MOCKING-BIRDS (CONTINUED).

THE little prisoners did not seem to object to their new home so long as I fed them every few minutes. The chief difficulty was to find enough of the food they liked, and dexterously to pop it into their great big yellow mouths at the very moment you caught them stretched wide open, which was often enough. Young mocking-birds do nothing but squeak, open their mouths for food, and squeak again. Their sharp, shrill chirrup can be called nothing sweeter than a squeak ;—"squeak, squeak," swallow what happens to suit them, take a very short nap, and squeak again so loud and incessantly, that you may hear them a long way off. At first they would eat only such things as their parents had been in the habit of bringing them,—worms, grubs, and insects; not only troublesome, but disagreeable and painful to procure and destroy. Then, if you were not extremely expert in popping the worm or the fly far back into the little throats just at the very moment birdies expected it, the poor stupid little things would not close

their bills and swallow : so out crawled the dinner, or away flew the supper ; then birdies, being cheated, would do nothing but squeak, squeak, squeak for a long time, while you must wait patiently, worm in hand, until one of them chooses to stretch open his mouth again. I assure you that so much time and patience did those young birds demand, that many times I thought I really must give up keeping them ; and being last spring so full of engagements, I often felt disposed to let them fly. But then it was my only chance of bringing any to England ; and on visiting their birthplace I found the nest forsaken, their brother and sister flown, and my two would have certainly perished if left there alone ; therefore—and as no one else would undertake the trouble of them—I was compelled to persevere.'

'Why would not any one take the trouble to feed them?' asked Maggie, who could not understand people wanting a thing and not taking a little trouble to procure it.

'Well, I am obliged to confess that young ladies in Virginia are not very fond of trouble. They are willing enough to give money for what they wish, but have scarcely the patience to feed and take care of troublesome little birds ; and my poor helpless fledgelings were really exceedingly troublesome. Their parents would have taught them where to find, and how to divide and eat, their food long before ; but with me they continued helpless baby birds, growing large, and even getting their quill feathers, yet unable to feed themselves. Nevertheless

they had a strong will of their own. Sometimes, after a great deal of trouble, I thought I had succeeded in getting a good mouthful down their gaping throats, when behold them shaking their heads and sneezing and spluttering, till they shook up their food again, in spite of hunger! This, however, was *instinct*,—that power answering to reason, which made the baby birds know much better than I did what was good for them; so all I had to do was to try first one thing and then another, till they swallowed something to suit them. That same wonderful instinct which God gives to all birds and animals to enable them to provide for themselves, proved also a better teacher than I could be, for it gave them lessons in feeding themselves. I will tell you how.

‘It is the nature of thrushes, you know, to eat live insects and worms; and to help them find such food, they are gifted with strong powers of observation. Any small, moving thing immediately attracts their attention, as if they suspected life and a dainty morsel there. You might sometimes see them attentively eyeing a rustling leaf or a tiny bit of rubbish stirred by a draught of air, then giving it a peck, as if to make sure whether it were alive. Thus the insects which came into the cage to taste the remnants of food began first to attract the attention of the young birds, who after a time made a dash at them, until, by degrees, they became quite expert at fly-catching. Next they attacked a poor worm in the bottom of the cage, standing over it, and twisting their heads this way and that, looking with first one eye and then the other, and

presently giving it a great dig with their hard pointed bill, and trying to pick it up. They made many attempts before they succeeded ; but when at last they did get anything into their own mouths, and even swallow it, you would have laughed to see how proud and self-satisfied they were. It was laughable, too, when they could *not* manage thus to feed themselves, how they would look first at me and then at the food, and then at me again, with an impatient gesture and a twittering which said as plainly as birds could speak, " Why don't you help me ? "

'And did you help them, auntie ?' Freddy inquired.

'Sometimes I did,—by holding whatever they were trying to pick up, so that they could get it more easily into their mouths ; or, by taking the opportunity of placing something which they liked very much close before them when I knew they were hungry—my object being to teach them to feed themselves. But you must not suppose that what they thus picked up for themselves ever satisfied their hunger, any more than *you* would be satisfied with half a dozen sugar-plums to serve you for breakfast, dinner, and supper one whole day. To the very last, birdies preferred and expected that I should feed them ; and the only way I had of making them independent was to place some favourite morsel in their cage when I knew that they were hungry, and immediately run out of sight. If the cunning little birdies only heard my voice, or caught sight of my dress, hungry as they were, they would wait, straining their necks and squeaking aloud to be helped. With such confiding, intelligent ways, you

could not help loving them, however much trouble they gave.

‘Happily, mocking-birds eat other things besides grubs and worms ; and by degrees you can accustom them to much nicer food, such as seeds, sopped bread, and fruit. But what they like above all things is a capsicum, or pod of the red-pepper plant ; and indeed, without this hot, pungent dessert to peck at frequently, they become ill. If you see their eyes less bright, or their feathers untidy—for they are remarkably neat birds, and expect a bath at least once a day—you may be sure they are not well. Another very important thing is, *plenty of sand*. In picking up food out-of-doors, all birds swallow a great deal of sand, earth, or other gritty substances, which act like minute millstones in their little crops, helping materially to grind and digest their food. And caged birds require this assistance still more. I had not had my young mocking-birds many days, before their eyes looked dim, and their face grew pale.’

At this the children laughed, and asked how feathers could look ‘pale.’

‘You laugh at the idea of a bird’s face growing pale ; but indeed it is so. Not the *feathers*, but the *skin*. When there is a want of colour about the loose skin of the eyes, nostrils, and beak—and in mocking-birds this is very conspicuous—you may be sure the bird is not well. Probably you have noticed in your hens and chickens, that when their combs and gills are pale they are out of health, and that a bright red comb is a sign of health.’

‘Oh yes; that we have!’ exclaimed both Duncan and Maggie. ‘And in spring the combs get much brighter than in winter.’

‘Well, my birdies looked dull and miserable, and I thought they were dying, when some one reminded me of the red-pepper and the sand; so I dabbled some ripe currants in sand and cayenne-pepper—making what we should think a most unpleasant mouthful—and waited for the right moment to pop them down their throats. To my joy, the young birds swallowed them willingly, and recovered their good looks wonderfully fast. Thus, with plenty of sand, plenty of red-pepper, and plenty of clean water, they were getting on tolerably well, learning to feed themselves, and to utter some pretty notes instead of incessant squeaks—when we set out on a long journey; and then came a terrible time for the mocking-birds.’

‘Was that when you were coming home, Aunt Jenny?’

‘I was coming northwards on my way home; for this was last May. The railroad frightened my birds dreadfully. So terrified with the noise and shaking were they, that they neither attempted to feed themselves, nor to open their mouths for me to feed them; and it was only when we stopped for any length of time that I could poke something down their throats, by catching them and opening their bills by main force,—a violent mode of proceeding, which often resulted in their coughing their supper up again, besides learning to fear me.

‘What with travelling night and day, and their getting no sleep, what with the sloppy discomfort of their clumsy

old cage, and what with the difficulty of feeding them, *that* was a terrible journey for the poor birdies ; for I could not meet with a nice cage in the country, and was intending to buy a new one in the city.'

'But they recovered, Aunt Jenny ! And were not you glad ?' cried Maggie gleefully.

'Yes. I spent several months in New York and the vicinity ; and during that time the young mocking-birds recovered their good looks, and began to improve rapidly. They learned to utter some very pretty notes, and were growing almost independent of my care, when another interruption arrived in the shape of the voyage across the Atlantic ; and again for some days were they nearly dying. But the farther I got from Virginia, the more precious did the mocking-birds become to me ; the more also did they increase in value. "If you get those birds safely across, madam, they will be worth twenty guineas to you in England," said a Yankee gentleman, who was accustomed to view everything according to its worth in money. And though I had no intention of sending my little birdies to market, you may be very sure I was pleased to hear them thus highly estimated. The steward of the ship was so obliging as to hang them in a warm, quiet corner, and there they received daily visits from many persons, attracting as much interest and attention as if they had been some very highly distinguished passengers.

'There being no grubs and insects on the ocean, I gave them for dinner a little fresh juicy meat, chopped fine ; and as there was plenty of that on board, as well as fruit,

red-pepper, seed, sand, sop, pure water, and careful nursing, the young birds were, on the whole, beginning to fare pretty well. But when we got fairly out to sea, some very rough weather set in. Great, big waves washed all over the ship, and dashed against the sides, and made it roll from side to side, so that the things on the tables went tumbling on to the floor, and the passengers could not stand on their feet; and we were all ill in our berths, and I was not able to see my birdies for two or three days. The good-natured steward sent word that he had fed them, but I knew he had as much as he could do to attend to the sick passengers; so, as soon as the weather became calmer, and I was able to walk, you can imagine with what anxiety I hastened to visit my pets,—when, judge of my distress, to find the plight they were in, and nearly starved to death besides! Their long quill feathers were broken; many from the tail were gone entirely; their heads were bruised and bleeding, their dim eyes half closed; in fact, never in my life had I beheld such miserable objects! It was true that the steward had placed food and water in their cage, but he could not prevent the water from running all over the bottom of it, and the food from falling about and getting spoiled; and he could not persuade the frightened little prisoners not to dash themselves against the broken wires, and wound their heads, and break their long quill feathers. They, poor little things, had not been able to comprehend the cause of the uproar and the upsetting of everything, and the untempting diet presented to them, none of which they had

eaten ; and so disgusted with their sloppy cage had they become, that they would not venture down even to look at their food, and for several days I despaired of saving their lives. I had to begin my training all over again, even to catching them, and opening their mouths by main force to administer doses of red-pepper seeds ; to which remedy, together with a fortunate change in the weather, that enabled me to give them constant attention, I attribute their recovery.'

The three children expressed immense satisfaction at the recovery of the two young mocking-birds, growing quite excited over the pleasure they anticipated in seeing them the next time they should visit their cousins at The Grange, near which was the home of Miss Erskine. 'Oh-h-h!' cried Maggie enthusiastically ; 'was not Miss Erskine de-l-l-l-ighted when you took them to her? How proud she must be of them, when scarcely any one else in all England has got any!'

'Well, Maggie,' returned her aunt, smiling, 'the poor, unplumed, dingy, shabby things, with their broken, ragged tails and wings, did not look much to be "proud" of. Indeed, so far from admiring them, my friends seemed to wonder what there could be in such ungainly birds worth caring for. Miss Erskine was too polite to express such an opinion, but I could see that her first feeling was that of disappointment rather than pleasure ; and you can scarcely wonder. Do you know, even your papa, with all his fondness for birds, said he should be "ashamed to carry such miserable-looking objects about with him?"'

‘But won’t they ever come pretty again?’ Freddy asked.

‘Yes, Freddy; if they live, they will. Even during the six weeks that I was at The Grange, they improved wonderfully, and were becoming general favourites. Gentle, affectionate manners are sure to gain love; and when they learned to recognise Miss Erskine’s voice, and to call to her as they used to call for me, and also to take food from her hand, she *was* delighted with them. Before I left The Grange new feathers were growing out fast; and General Erskine went so far as to admit that the mocking-birds were growing “really good-looking fellows, after all.”’

Duncan was making further inquiries concerning the polyglot thrushes, when the young party received a summons to tea, and the conversation was postponed till some future opportunity.





CHAPTER VIII.

NO MORE STORIES AT PRESENT.

HAGER as Duncan and Maggie had been to hear more about the American thrushes, the birds all at once vanished entirely out of their heads, and Aunt Jenny's services grew in request for a totally different purpose.

For the next day happened to be one which had been fixed for a shopping expedition to the neighbouring town of Dollington to buy Christmas presents, and a carriage-load of children started off with their mamma and aunt soon after breakfast; and on their return about dusk, if you had only seen how, in addition to the merry party, all manner of queer-shaped parcels were stowed away in the carriage, you would have wondered how they all could be packed in such a limited space.

What these parcels all contained was a profound secret. All I know is, that for weeks every penny had been hoarded up by the children to add to their money-boxes, which, at this season of the year, were regularly emptied and expended to the very last farthing. Everybody was

going to give something to everybody else in the house ; but what the gift was, no one was supposed to know except the giver of that particular article, and Aunt Jenny, who was in the secrets of the whole family.

That evening Aunt Jenny's room presented an appearance something between a warehouse and a nursery ; for all the queer-shaped parcels had been conveyed thither ; and all the children felt it their bounden duty to run in and out repeatedly, to assure themselves of the safety of their respective purchases. And no easy matter that was, without tearing the paper just the least bit ; thus risking the exposure of the contents—maybe a soldier's helmet, a doll's foot, the corner of a book or a puzzle-box, etc. etc.—to the eyes of the very last person in the house who should catch sight of the said article.

Now all these strange-looking parcels had to be re-packed in nice white paper, and tied up, and sealed and addressed, with all sorts of pretty sentiments, to some person or persons unknown ; and the next day, after feeding the pets, the children were all the morning closeted with their aunt in this important task. The curious part of it was, that, notwithstanding the whole party had gone into the shops together to make their purchases, such an immense amount of mystery was essential to the success of the business. Thus each child in turn had a secret with Aunt Jenny, to the exclusion of somebody else ; and how to get rid of that somebody was the great difficulty. Consequently, at one time Maggie was despatched on an errand, which kept her absent a most provoking time ; and when

she came back, certain articles which had provided her with much interesting speculation had totally disappeared, while among an increasing pile of white packages—which it was considered a point of honour not to examine too closely—she could not at all detect anything answering to their shape. Then, just as Duncan espied a paint-box, which until to-day he had never before seen, his aunt all at once missed her keys: she was not quite sure whereabouts in the drawing-room, the library, or the dining-room she had left them, but Dunny, she knew, would find them for her? And Dunny, of course, could not refuse to oblige his kind aunt. Meantime, paint-box and two or three other articles which he had been longing to handle had vanished from view, while the pile of white parcels had considerably increased, and Freddy looked wonderfully wise while trying to reckon them up. But, pho! Mr. Fred, *you* are now wanted. Nurse is waiting to fit on some new boots. Yes; you may look at those on your feet, and compare the size of them with that pair of skates which have burst through their brown paper covering. “Too short for Duncan?” are they. Perhaps so. Never you mind. Nurse is waiting; run along.’ So Freddy had to leave the skates and the rest of the things to be packed without them; for when he came back, you will easily guess that the new skates were no longer to be seen. Even Ellie had been coaxed to look at things out of the window not half so attractive as a bit of blue something which, by climbing into a chair, she could manage to see on the very top of auntie’s pillow. Be-

longing to the blue was what looked extremely like the hand of a waxen young lady too ; but while Maggie called her to see something out of doors, the waxen hand and bit of blue were gone : so at last not a single thing remained to be peeped at. Every parcel had been repacked : the more intricate and difficult to do up, the greater the fun of tying and sealing and writing upon it. And now, such a pile of white paper parcels as that table presented ! Long ones, round ones, flat, hard, crooked, puffy, heavy, light, great odd-shaped things, little tiny ones—forms and sizes far more easily imagined by you than described by me.

Thus passed the morning ; and the afternoon being too snowy to go out, the children anticipated a good game of Christmas romps with Aunt Jenny : consequently it was rather disappointing to find that she was so exceedingly busy in the library that they could not even speak to her, and were told to amuse themselves up-stairs. Once, when Duncan went down for a book, he found the library door locked, though he was quite sure he heard voices inside. Fuzzy, Maggie's little white Maltese terrier, decided so likewise ; for Maggie said she never barked and scratched at a door like that unless some one she wanted was inside. While Aunt Jenny was at dinner, Duncan again went for his book, but found the door still locked. Another unaccountable thing was, that every single parcel was gone out of Aunt Jenny's room, and was nowhere to be found ; and he was quite sure papa would never let the library be 'littered up' with those kind of things ; so 'what could have become of them?' no one could tell.

62 *Aunt Jenny's American Pets.*

Dinner—that day an hour earlier than usual—was soon over ; for it was Mr. and Mrs. Morton's custom to devote Christmas-eve to their children's amusement ; and though Duncan and Maggie, on expressing a wish to go into the library, thought their papa's reasons for keeping the door locked rather droll, and Aunt Jenny's reasons for having had all the parcels ' put out of the way till to-morrow ' still more droll, they were soon too deeply absorbed in Christmas games to think of anything beyond fun and frolic.

The invariable snap-dragon wound up the evening ; and then the young folks retired to rest, full of joyful anticipations of the morrow, and of happy trustfulness in those loving friends who were devoting themselves so thoroughly to their happiness.

If I fill too many pages with these Christmas doings, my young readers will ask, 'Where are the stories of American Pets that this book professes to tell us ?' So, as this chapter is merely to explain why the stories ceased for a time, I will ask you to picture to yourselves the bright frosty Christmas morning, the happy family gathered round the breakfast-table, the nice little talk with mamma afterwards about the sacred event which they were now going to church to commemorate (for Mr. and Mrs. Morton were careful to impress upon the minds of their children and domestics that not in pleasure only should Christmas-day be passed) ; the rather early dinner, of which all the children, even down to baby, partook with papa and mamma ; and after dinner the DESSERT, for this was the time when the Christmas gifts were usually distributed and the fun began.

But to-day, for some reason or other—(the hard frost, perhaps, and the way the wind lay, or baby ; I am not sure what)—Mrs. Morton proposed that dessert should be finished *before* the gifts were distributed, and that the party should then adjourn to the library to receive and examine them, as she had had them conveyed thither ; a proposal which rather surprised the young people, and rendered them anxious to despatch their oranges and sweets with all speed. But, what with chestnuts to be roasted, crackers to be pulled, and oranges to be turned inside out without injury, it was growing quite dark when Freddy urged, ‘Now mayn’t we go and get our presents out of the library?’ Suddenly up jumped Aunt Jenny, saying, ‘Wait for me. Excuse me a few minutes. I must just go and ——’ Go and do what —— no one heard, as she ran off without finishing her sentence ; but Mrs. Morton nodded and smiled, and Mr. Morton cried ‘All right!’ and told funny stories till she came back.

‘Now we’re ready!’ cried she, coming back ; and catching little Ellie in her arms, led the way to the library, every one else, dogs and all, bustling after her, to behold, as they expected, the centre-table piled high with the missing packages. Judge of the surprise which awaited them ! Instead of the table, there, in the very middle of the room, stood a Christmas tree !—a blazing, dazzling, sparkling, astonishing Christmas tree, planted in a large tub, and towering to the ceiling, every branch laden with beauty and brilliancy.

Probably nearly every child who reads this book has seen a Christmas tree. But it so happened that the little

Mortons never had, excepting those 'bits of things' (as they called the insignificant apologies for the noble production) displayed in the Dollington shops. And those had not been lighted ! So, if you can remember the first large lighted Christmas tree you ever saw, and if it was half as splendid as Aunt Jenny's Christmas tree, you can imagine the amazement and raptures of the little Mortons. The tub, partially filled with sand, was decorated with elegant devices, and fringes of coloured and gilded paper. Piled in a pyramid round the stem, as high as the lower branches, were the precious white packages, with the writing all uppermost, so that each person could read his or her own name and the name of the giver. Upon the branches hanging, or perching, or in some way secured, were scores of gay and lovely articles,—fairies and mountebanks, and dolls and drolleries, gilded and silvered balls, besides fruits and sweets, and countless tapers illuminating the whole. Now were the mysteries of the door-locking and Fuzzy's persistent scratching unravelled ; now did the children discover what Aunt Jenny's 'very particular business' had been ; and the wonder was how she had found time to accomplish so much without detection. And so she had hurried away from the dining-room to summon Mrs. Spicer, and nurse, and butler, and Thomas, to help to light up the countless tapers with all possible haste. That was why they had all waited so long in the dark.

But as you know all about Christmas trees, and the gathering of their glittering fruits, I need only add, that all the pleasure you ever enjoyed around one was more than

exceeded by the ecstatic delight of these little Mortons, who, one and all, pronounced their tree to be the most beautiful, magical thing they had ever beheld; and 'exactly like a fairy tale.'

On New Year's-eve there was going to be a juvenile party; and so anxious were the elder children that their young friends should behold this splendid tree, that they agreed not to gather a single thing off it, but, except opening the paper parcels, to let it remain just as it was, if papa and mamma would spare the library so long. Mr. and Mrs. Morton indulgently consenting to this, Aunt Jenny promised to fasten on a fresh supply of tapers before New Year's-eve, when the grand gathering was to take place.

Hard frost and bright clear weather set in about that time, and, to Duncan's delight, he was able to pass several hours of each day in skating on a large pond in an adjoining field. And now a new surprise awaited the children. Only think of Aunt Jenny's turning out to be a skater! and a most accomplished skater! And she had never given the least hint of venturing upon ice. 'What was the use of talking about it so long as there was no ice to go upon?' was her argument. Because she had not wished to create regrets in the children's minds that they could not use their new skates; for, as it happened, not only Freddy, but Maggie, had found a beautiful pair among their Christmas gifts. So now the most charming skating parties met at the pond for several days, and, under Miss Morton's guidance, both Maggie and Freddy learned

to skate famously; and Duncan acquired several new feats.

So what with these out-door amusements, what with the New Year's-eve party, what with the reading of new books, the playing new games, and the putting together of new puzzles, you will not wonder that two or three weeks passed away without any more thought of the bird stories.





CHAPTER IX.

MORE ABOUT THE THRUSHES.

THE gardener at Mortonfield had a son—a well-mannered, intelligent lad—a few years older than Duncan, and who had been his frequent attendant in the summer fishing excursions and other out-door sports. This boy had naturally caught the young gentleman's enthusiasm for live pets; indeed, to Jim's skill in the matter of trap-setting, the children were indebted for Podgie and their tame squirrel, to say nothing of dormice.

Now Duncan had of course imparted to Jim a full and particular account of the mocking-thrushes which his aunt had brought from America, and of his own prospect of possessing a pair at no very distant day; his history being summed up by a resolution to obtain a pair of English thrushes, and bring them up by hand, in order to see if they would display any of the imitative powers of their American cousins.

Jim cordially reciprocated this idea, promising that

nothing would be easier than to procure some young thrushes next spring, as he knew a place in the laurels where, both last year and the year before, a pair had built a nest ; and he had very little doubt but they would choose the same bush again.

This gratifying prospect Duncan joyfully imparted to his aunt one morning, when—the frost being all gone—he and Maggie, Fuzzy, Ponto, and Cæsar were just starting out for a long walk with her. And the mention of the English thrushes quickly reverted to the subject of the American thrushes, and Duncan's oft-repeated regrets at not possessing any. Could not Aunt Jenny write to some of her friends in America to send over some young mocking-birds next spring, or another whole year must elapse before any arrived ? So spoke Dunny, sure of his own ability to rear them, notwithstanding Maggie's more diffident fears to the contrary. Self-confident, and not easily daunted, Duncan thoughtlessly persisted that it was 'such a pity Aunt Jenny had brought only two birds !' 'Why had not she ?' 'Could not she find the nests ?' 'Had she not enough cages ?' and so on.

'As for cages, I had one very large one, which would have served for travelling ; and finding nests was no difficult matter. But to make sure of the young birds when you do find them, is the point. You remember my telling you of a foolish way mocking-birds have of flying out of the nest, and screeching in the face of any one who passes too closely ?'

'Oh yes,' Both children remembered that ; and that

Aunt Jenny had nearly had her eyes pecked out by a pair of old mocking-birds.

‘Yes ; and on this account, and also from the fact that thrushes usually build low, we easily discovered where the nests were ; but to keep the places a secret from the negroes was quite another thing. The little black children thought they were doing me good service in hunting the woods for birds’ nests, and when ——’

‘But why did you tell them anything about it, dear Aunt Jenny?’ Maggie put in. ‘I wouldn’t.’

Miss Morton laughed as she repeated, ‘*Tell* them ! As if one could stir out-of-doors on a plantation without a troop of little darkies after one ! Those negroes lived on the estate, you must remember. Their parents had gone to work in the fields, after locking up the doors of their cabins, leaving their children to take care of themselves, and with no other employment than to roll and tumble about in the sunshine, or go to sleep, or play in the woods, and be up to all manner of mischief.’

Maggie thought it very strange that the mothers did not stay at home and look after their children ; and still more strange that they should lock them out of their houses ; until her aunt reminded her that the mothers themselves were slaves, whose time was not their own, and that untaught children—to whom mischief comes naturally—might have set the cabins or themselves on fire, and done all sorts of damage in-doors.

Maggie seemed inclined to hear of the negroes in preference to the thrushes just now ; but Duncan said, ‘Oh

no ! Tell us about that young bird which you left out on a log all day.'

'That was also a thrush—one commonly known as a "thrasher," also the "French mocking-bird;" and, when only half fledged, is so like the true mocking-bird, that it was brought to me in mistake for one. If you have patience to listen to the history of that little thrush, Maggie will have the pleasure of hearing more about her friends the negroes ; and you, Dunny, will learn something of the difficulties one had to surmount in order to procure any young birds at all.'

Duncan and Maggie both professed themselves to be equally satisfied ; and as they tripped along, one on each side of their aunt, she began the history of—





CHAPTER X.

THE THRASHERS.

WHEN I went to spend the winter in Georgia, it was no sooner known that massa's friend, "*Miss Jinny*," as they called me, wished for some young birds to keep in cages, than the negro boys began to set traps in all directions. The poor children felt sure of being rewarded for whatever they brought to the house; so one day a boy brought a live pigeon, another day a wren, then an owl, and next day a dove. Everything they could lay their hands on in the shape of a bird, alive or dead—no matter which or what—was brought for Miss Jinny.'

'And did you keep them all, auntie?'

'No; the poor pigeon had its leg broken, and I begged the boy to kill it at once. The wren was more dead than alive, and the owl was in a pitiable state. The beautiful little dove with a broken wing I nursed for a few days, letting it have the liberty of the piazza on to which my room opened, and where, being high, I thought it would be

safe ; but it got away,—whether in the clutches of a hawk or a cat, I never knew. Not a day passed but some fresh victim, maimed or wounded, was brought to me ; and had I refused to accept it, I might have lost an opportunity of procuring what I really did want.'

'But how was it that the birds got hurt so?' said Duncan.

'The traps were of such a clumsy construction. One which I saw was four or five rough boards propped together like a box, with an open space at one end through which a bird could enter, and with thin string hung across in such a manner, that when a bird ventured within to pick up the grains of corn scattered at the farther corner, its head or feet would become entangled in this string, and down would tumble the heavy planks upon the poor little captive, which, if small, was almost sure to be killed. Sometimes the top plank was kept down by a heavy stone, as if to ensure immediate death. Sometimes bricks, placed on end to keep down the edges of a net, or of a piece of old carpeting supported in an equally unskilful manner on twigs, were made to answer the purpose ; and on reaching the corn the bird got its head in a noose ;—a clever way that, if you wished for a dead bird ; but not adapted to my wants.

'The negroes had been accustomed to set traps of this kind to ensnare rabbits and larger birds for food, and for which purpose, if the captive was killed, it was all the better ; but they did not reflect that the same means would not answer for delicate little cage-birds ; they ——'

‘What dreadfully stupid, cruel children!’ exclaimed Maggie.

‘Yes, Maggie. They set no value on the life of any creature. The amazing stupidity of those poor, untaught little negroes can scarcely be believed. And to think that their cruelty was equal to their stupidity, is indeed shocking!’

Duncan was so persistent in wishing to know what the children did to the birds, though his aunt was unwilling to dwell upon the subject, that at last she reluctantly replied: ‘Dear children, if I were to stop and describe such barbarities as pricking out the eyes, chopping or burning off the feet, plucking or singeing off the feathers, and even worse, and thinking it capital fun to see the tortured creatures trying to hop about in helpless misery, it would only render you unhappy. But do not blame the wretched, neglected children of slavery who practised these cruelties; lament the fetters which bound them down in sin and ignorance; and let us thank God in our hearts that the sun of freedom has at length risen upon them, bringing with it Christian teachers, who are willing to devote their lives to the rooting out of these vicious propensities from their deadened hearts, and planting instead the knowledge and love of that merciful Father, who never willingly afflicts or grieves His children.’

Poor little Maggie’s eyes were full of tears, and for some minutes she could not recover from the distress and horror occasioned by what her aunt had described; and Duncan seemed sorry and ashamed to have been so eager to hear anything so truly horrible.

'Try not to think of it, dear children,' said Miss Morton, almost regretting that she had even hinted at the cruelties so common among the negroes; 'or think of it only to rejoice that the poor little black children are now employing their time in learning useful things. But you can now easily imagine that, as soon as I heard of these cruelties, my anxiety to put a stop to bird-catching was even greater than it had been to encourage it—at least so far as the negro children were concerned; and the only way was to refuse to purchase any more of the maimed and useless captives, for which I had given a few cents, if only to release from certain torture, by handing them over to one of the in-door servants to put to immediate death.'

'Then how did you get any birds at all, Aunt Jenny?' inquired Maggie, drying her eyes.

'Ah, *how*! I told you it was no easy matter. Well, whenever I could escape from my sable train, I searched the bushes myself for nests; and this, in that hot climate, could be done only very early in the morning, or about the time of sunset.

'Belonging to the plantation was a pretty little cemetery, enclosed by a fence, and planted with flowers and evergreens. There were paths in it, and a seat, and the grass was short; and I often sat there at dusk watching and listening to the birds and insects.'

'Was it full of graves, auntie?'

'No; happily it was not. It was a small cemetery for members of the family only; and as yet contained but three graves,—two children who had died in infancy, and

an aunt. The negro burying-ground was in another part of the estate. In one corner of this little cemetery was a large, tall rose-bush, and among the many birds which frequented this bush were two which I took to be mocking-birds. They came so regularly, that, after two or three days' observation, I felt sure they must have a nest there ; so I watched my opportunity to take a peep. But to see into the centre of the bush was no such easy matter. If you wish to know what that Georgia rose-bush was like, imagine half a dozen of the thickest and tallest rose-trees you ever saw, crowded all on to one stem, and furnished plentifully with large, long thorns as sharp as pins. That was the sort of bush Aunt Jenny had to deal with. There was nothing to stand upon but the seat at the other end of the graveyard,—an old rickety, heavy thing, which might have tumbled to pieces in moving. I could not ask anybody to help me, as I wished to keep the place secret. So, arming myself with a long, hooked stick, I dragged aside the outer branches, but was even then as far from the centre as ever. How birds ever got into the middle of that thick, thorny bush, and got out of it again, was a puzzle. The denseness of their hiding-place was their security. In the course of a few days, by cutting away some of the branches above the reach of the children's eyes and arms, and by dragging a log from the neighbouring woods to the spot,—a task I accomplished by moving it a few yards at a time,—I managed to get a peep into the middle of the bush, where my eyes were rewarded by the sight of a thrush's nest. The next question was how to get at it ;

for it was far beyond reach, and surrounded with the close, strong, thorny branches. Well, I provided myself with plenty of string ; and with this I tied back some of the branches to the fence on each side, leaving a great gap for me to approach the centre. Just as I was mounting my log to commence operations, whom should I see but the whole gang of negroes coming towards the cemetery on their way home from work ! Quickly as possible down I scrambled, and loosed the string to let back the branches ; for no sooner did the negroes espy me, than three or four of them made straight for the place to see what I was after, and to offer their assistance, thinking I wanted to gather some of the rose-buds. It was a long time before I could get rid of them, for they expected a chat, and began to ask "why I was always hunting weeds?" as they called the wild flowers which I was collecting ; while one of them thought to add to my collection by officiously cropping the rose-bush, and another was for carrying off the precious log which had cost me so much trouble to bring there, and which they persisted must be very much in my way. But at last they departed to their homes, though by that time it was quite too late for me to proceed with my investigations. I was in a terrible fright lest the curiosity of the negroes should lead them to examine the bush next morning and discover my treasure ; therefore it was no slight relief to find that they had done no greater damage than to carry off my log, which was nowhere to be seen. The graveyard was nearly half a mile from the house, and there was no choice

left me but to go all the way back in the broiling sunshine, and fetch a stool, bribing the whole tribe of young negroes, who were for following me, to go off to a distant part of the plantation, under the pretence that I wished to sit quietly and read my book in a cool, shady place by myself.'

'I should think you *did* have trouble to get any birds, Aunt Jenny,' said Maggie, with a great sigh, as if she were fatigued by even hearing of such hard work. 'Couldn't you ask the gardener, or anybody?'

'I would have got a great big knife, or a hatchet, and cut away the branches, or climbed on the fence,' said Duncan.

'Then how about handling those sharp thorns an inch long, Dunny? In spite of gloves, such bleeding, smarting wrists, and such torn sleeves and arms had I, that I thought I really must give up the attempt. But I was rewarded when, at last reaching a hand into the nest, I felt five young birdies nearly ready to fly.'

'Five! Five young, real mocking-birds! Oh, jolly! Did you take them all, Aunt Jenny?'

'No, Dunny; only three of them. They were almost too young to be taken from their parents; but I thought it best to make sure of them, and run the chance of rearing them.'

'Yes, oh yes; that was much the best, I think,' cried Maggie, tripping along with delight that at last some young birds were secured. 'And then you needn't get any more scratches.'

'Well, what with scissors, and knives, and string, and logs, and stools, and broiling heat, and the scratchings, and bleedings, and smartings, and torn dresses, those little birds ought to be worth something, you will say,' replied Aunt Jenny, laughing at the recollection of her adventures.

'And did they all live?' 'What did you do with them?' 'Where are they now?' both children eagerly inquired.

'You will be disappointed to hear that they did *not* all live; but you can little imagine the obstacles that came in the way of Aunt Jenny's bird-rearing. Something about it you have heard in the history of the Virginia mocking-birds, though the difficulty of managing the birds themselves was not half so great as that of managing the negroes, who were twice as numerous as those on the Virginia plantation, and who, I grieve to tell you, were as ignorant of obedience as they were of compassion or any other virtue, poor neglected little souls that they were! Consequently, my fledgelings were never safe a moment out of my sight. As soon as my back was turned, three or four children would steal up the stairs to get a peep at Miss Jinny's mocking-birds. Had they been content with *only* peeping, one could have excused it, but ——'

'But, auntie, did those dirty, ragged children really come into the house; and did they go all the way up-stairs to your room?'

'They often found an excuse to run over the house on some errand or other, and after mischief too, if the family

or the elder servants were out of the way. In that hot climate the doors and windows are open all day long ; and it was quite as warm there in February and March as it is in England in June and July. Even the ducks and chickens find their way into the house, and make themselves quite at home in the dining-hall during meals.'

This amused Duncan and Maggie vastly ; but Maggie seemed to think that the fowls must make a great mess in the house.

'It does not do to be too particular in that part of the world, Maggie ; though I must admit that, what with pigeons and poultry, and cats and dogs, and pigs, and troops of grubby, little, half-naked negroes lying about in all directions, and myriads of flies and other insects, a southern mansion is certainly not quite so pleasant a home as Mortonfield.

'It happened that the very next day after I brought home the three little thrushes, one of the out-door aunties ——'

'A negro woman ?'

'A negress—yes. All the grown-up negroes and negresses are called uncles and aunties : "Uncle Jim," "Aunt Becky," and so on.'

'Oh yes. We remember you told us that.'

'Well, an aunt called Claratine ——'

'What a fine name !' 'What a grand name !' 'I never heard that name before !' shouted both children.

'The poor things are very fond of grand names ; and sometimes they fix on one which no one ever did hear of,

for they make it up themselves out of other fine-sounding names, which they are pretty sure to call wrong. Claratine is quite rational, in comparison.

'And this Aunt Claratine,' continued Miss Morton when the two children had ended their fun about the fine names—'Aunt Clarry brought me a little bird almost exactly like my three, only a few days older, and of a rather more reddish hue than I thought the mocking-birds ought to be. She persisted that it was a mocking-bird; and when I begged her to bring another or two, or else show me where the nest was, she made all sorts of excuses, and pretended she had forgotten the bush.'

'Why did not she want you to know it?'

'I fancy she hoped to sell the birds, and get more money for them elsewhere; or, perhaps, she thought I would take it for a mocking-bird, and pay her more than it was worth, if I did not see the parent birds and the nest, to judge for myself. Because, though she wanted me to believe it was a mocking-bird, everybody else called it a "thrasher." Now I had heard common thrushes called by that name; and the most disappointing part of it was, that each day *my* three little thrushes grew more and more like this little thrasher, and less and less what I expected them to be; and when, in dismay, I carried them to show to a gentleman who I thought knew more about birds than Aunt Claratine, and he pronounced all four to be "*thrashers*,—yes, certainly thrashers,"—I was wofully mortified indeed. Thrashers, or "French mocking-birds," he called them.'

'French mocking-bird ! Is there such a bird, Aunt Jenny?'

'Yes, Dunny. One of the thrush tribe is' generally known by that name, but it happened that I had never seen one before. Still I could not help doubting and hoping ; for in form and manners, and most respects, they were so precisely like young mocking-birds, that I could not quite cease to look upon them as such. Some quill feathers were to decide the point.'

'Quill feathers, Aunt Jenny?' repeated Duncan inquiringly.

'Yes ; certain white feathers in the wings and tail of the mocking-birds, and which the thrashers have not got. You can imagine with what impatience I waited for those all-important feathers to reveal themselves, and with what vexation I saw my four little thrushes grow more and more of the reddish or rusty-brown colour every day, and their breasts more decidedly speckled ; yet so foolish was Aunt Jenny, that she tried to persuade herself that it was only because they were young and half fledged, and that the pale delicate hue of the true mocking-bird had not yet shown itself. At last the white began to appear on the wings ; and in a few more days two distinct bars of white, instead of the end feathers of white, told me they were only thrashers, after all !'

'How very disappointing !' Maggie exclaimed.

'But,' argued Duncan, 'they might turn out to be good singers for all that, else why should they be called French mocking-birds?'

‘Exactly; and my friends did assure me that many persons liked them quite as well as the true mocking-bird, though that was a poor consolation. At that time I knew very little about thrushes, but afterwards found that the thrasher is one of the commonest of them, and generally earlier than its mocking-bird cousin; and though it does not absolutely imitate other sounds, its own natural song is so rich and varied, and its manners in a cage so engaging, that it is very often kept as a pet, and is a universal favourite.’

‘Tell us the difference between the thrasher and the real mocking-bird, Aunt Jenny?’ asked Duncan.

‘Its wings and tail are not quite so long, and with no black feathers in them. Then there are the two bars of white on each wing, the speckled breast, and the reddish or rust-colour tint of the rest of the plumage,—like the colour of iron-mould, from which it is named *ferruginous* —“the ferruginous thrush.” *Fer*, you know, is the French for iron; and this will help you to remember the name. Another name by which it is known, *Rufus*, is still easier to remember; for you know which king was called *Rufus*, and why?’

‘Oh yes; William Rufus, because he had red hair. We will call your birds the William Rufus thrushes; then we shall remember them capitally.’

‘Only, the thrashers are not so red as carrot hair: they are rusty-brown birds, you understand; reddish-brown, instead of pale or ashy-brown.’

‘And why are they called French mocking-birds, if they do not mock?’ asked Duncan.



MOCKING BIRD, THRASHER, AND AMERICAN ROBIN.

‘That I cannot tell you. The general appearance and character of the thrasher are more that of our common English thrush, except that its tint is redder. Its song is very rich and sweet, and has great power.’

‘Then your four little birds *were* worth keeping, Aunt Jenny?’

‘Yes, indeed, Maggie; and dear little things they were too. And my piazza was a famous place for them. It was just like an outside room,—walls on three sides, and the front all open, and with railings; and the roses which were planted along the drawing-room verandah trailed up the columns, and reached all up to mine. It had a deep overhanging roof also, and was delightfully shady. It led to no other room outside, but belonged to my room only; so that I could have the great wide door always open, which I did night and day.’

‘I should be afraid of something coming in,’ said Maggie.

‘What should come in but bats and insects? And they would have come in at the windows anyhow, for it was too hot to sleep without air. There were pots of geraniums and other plants on my piazza, and in one corner was the basket containing my little fledgelings. As soon as they grew old enough to hop about, I clipped their wings, and then I had a great thick branch of a tree propped up in the corner, and they learned to hop from twig to twig among the leaves, and were as happy as little birds could be.’

‘And did they feed themselves?’

'Yes, tolerably well ; though, like mocking-birds, they are always willing to be waited upon. They were exceedingly tame, and enjoyed the free range of my room as well as the piazza. In fact you could never know where to find the impudent little things ; so that, whenever I went out, I shut them up close in their cage. The worst part of my business was to get a sufficient supply of worms and grubs for them.'

Duncan was of opinion that, with such numbers of negroes, and such lots of children with nothing to do, it must be easy enough to get plenty of worms.

'The grown-up negroes had their own business to attend to ; the out-door servants went off at daybreak to work in the fields, and the in-door ones had no idea of leaving their work to dig for worms. It was impossible for me to be running out all day long in the heat to find food for the birds ; and you might bribe and coax the children in vain. They would promise to bring me some, and then all run off under pretence of finding them, returning after several hours—if at all—and then with only two or three dead flies, or a caterpillar, pretending they could not find any worms or grubs ; so I generally trusted to my own exertions for the supply of my little birds' pantry. It was too early for fruit, and too late for winter berries, and I was puzzled enough to get the variety of food which they required.

'But here we are at home, and it is positively luncheon-time ; so we must postpone the rest of the story for another day.'



CHAPTER XI.

MORE ABOUT THE THRASHERS.

THE next morning being equally fine, Duncan and Maggie coaxed their aunt to take them for another long walk, that they might learn the fate of those four young thrashers. Barely had they got down the hall-door steps, before she was called upon to answer their eager inquiries. For once, even Fuzzy was forgotten, until her loud barking demanded that the door should be re-opened on her express account. And Fuzzy had quickly attached herself to Miss Morton, who had left a pet dog of her own in Philadelphia, and of which Fuzzy strongly reminded her. Then they almost grudged the few minutes necessary to go and loosen Cæsar from his kennel; poor Ponto at the same time tearing round through the back yard, loudly proclaiming his intention to be of the party.

‘You said, Aunt Jenny,’ urged Duncan, as soon as the six were fairly through the lodge gates,—‘you said that the little thrashers did not all live. What made them die?’

‘The first that died was the one Aunt Clarry had brought me—the eldest, the liveliest, the boldest, and the most affectionate of them all. None of the rest fluttered to meet me, and came at my call as he did—“twe-et, twe-et, twe-et”—so pleased was that little birdie to see me approach, so intelligent and loving was he. I suppose his wing was not clipped enough: the young feathers grew out very quickly, for one day he astonished me by taking flight all across the room, then on to the rails of the piazza, when, after an admiring survey of a neighbouring tree, he made straight for its inviting foliage, but, failing to reach it, fell to the ground.’

‘Oh aunty!’ cried Maggie in alarm; ‘and did that kill him?’

‘No; his wings were strong enough to break the fall and support him to the ground, though not strong enough to bear him in the air. He chirped very proudly, and looked surprised too, as he surveyed the new world below; then jerked up his head at me when I called and scolded him, as if he had performed a wonderful feat; and when—fearing a cat might be in the way—I ran down to secure him, he seemed more disposed to avail himself of his new liberty than to be carried back to his companions. After that, he tried again to reach the tree; and when a second time on the ground I tried to coax him to fly up to me, he did make several attempts, but could not raise himself to that height. Naughty little pet! He seemed perfectly wild with delight at his newly discovered powers, and made the other three almost as giddy as himself, for they all

began to hop and fly and flutter about my room and the piazza, and I had enough to do to restrain them. That very afternoon, before I could clip their wings a little more, Mr. Impudence made a third attempt to fly off the piazza, and this time reached the tree in safety,—he who ought to have set the rest a good example !’

‘Perhaps he thought he *was* setting a good example by being the first to fly,’ observed Duncan. ‘Did he come back again all right?’

‘I grieve to say he did not. He hopped from branch to branch, seldom losing sight of me, coming as near as the boughs would let him, but yet afraid to venture upon the long flight back. I stood calling and coaxing, and stretching out my hand with food, and then went down below and renewed my invitations ; but no ! He was like that boy we saw the other day, afraid to jump the ditch—making many attempts, yet never getting up the necessary amount of courage for the spring. My little thrasher came to the end of the boughs to ask me to fetch him, as I had fetched him from below ; but how could I ? The tree had a tall, straight stem, and the branches could not be reached. When the negroes came home from work they might bring a ladder ; but supposing one of them should get into the tree, the bird would not be caught by any one but me. Meantime it was growing dark and chilly, and by the tone of the chirp I knew the poor little bird was not only frightened, but hungry and very miserable. He had been accustomed to sleep in a snug warm nest with the other three ; so when at last there was no alternative but to leave him out all

night, you may be sure I went to bed quite as unhappy as he was.'

It was such a pity, Duncan and Maggie thought, that he had not been kept in a cage as soon as he was old enough to fly: they only wondered he had not fallen off the piazza long before.

'Yes, Dunny; we often find, when it is too late, that it would have been better to do something different. The piazza-rails had been made safe by a net; but it was the rapid growth of the feathers that surprised me. When the quill feathers had first begun to come, I cut off what seemed a good long piece from one wing; but an inch or so from a half-grown wing would be scarcely missed among the full-grown quills, and this I did not think about soon enough.'

'And the next morning how was the little bird?' asked Maggie anxiously.

'Ah, now comes the sad part of the story! The night turned cold and rainy; and as soon as it was light I watched and called for my pet every few minutes, going out upon the piazza to look and listen, but not a chirp could I hear: nowhere could I see him. Another pair of eyes were watching the tree as eagerly and perseveringly as mine, and those eyes belonged to a cat sitting underneath, and who, I felt sure, could see among the leaves some object of interest which I could not. It might be my poor pet, it might be another bird. Mine, if still there, was too feeble, doubtless, or too benumbed to chirp; or possibly it was fascinated by those terrible eyes

below. I sent to have the cat driven away, but she only resumed her watch at a distance ; and when, by and by, to my horror, I saw my poor, helpless little thrasher come fluttering to the ground, that terrible cat was first and quickest to make a spring, and give it a grip which proved its death-blow !'

'Oh aunty ! Aunt Jenny ! The poor, poor, dear little thrush !' cried Maggie. 'Was it quite, quite dead ?'

'No. Before the cat could be driven off she had broken its wing, and had probably bruised it internally. I nursed it for twenty-four hours, and then it died.'

Duncan and Maggie were equally grieved at the fate of the poor little thrasher, but presently remarked that it was lucky it was only a common thrush after all, and not a mocking-bird, and that Aunt Jenny had three more still left.

'Yes ; and as the Rufus thrushes are earlier than many of the rarer birds, I still had hopes of procuring some of the more valuable species.'

'And you did have some other birds besides, did you not, Aunty ?'

'Yes, in the course of the spring. But it is sad to think of the number that were sacrificed.'

'How ? By getting away like the little thrasher ?'

'No, Dunny. Before they came into my possession at all. By refusing to accept of injured birds, I hoped to check the cruelties of the negro children ; but to put a stop to nest-hunting altogether was quite impossible. The woods were looked upon as common property, and bird-

nesting as a negro privilege with which no one had any right to interfere. My only way, therefore, was to promise to pay liberally for any young bird which should be brought to me free from injury; but notwithstanding this bribe the season was fast passing away, and, as yet, I had none. Each day's inquiries brought only disappointment and vexation. "Laws, yes, Miss Jinny!" the children would say; "I knows whar a nest is that I'll bring you to-morrow." But the morrow never came: the birds had either "got away," or were destroyed before I could manage to secure them. "Sally had caught some and let them go again," they told me, or "Aunt Amanda had found a nest and sent Phil to bring the young birds home, but he ate them coming along."

'Ate them, Aunt Jenny!' exclaimed both children. 'Ate the live birds!'

'You may well be amazed. I was told that Phil ate all the very young birds he could find, and that it was impossible to keep a nest from him. Once I spoke to him about it, thinking he could not be such a perfect savage; but he only grinned and said they tasted just as good as the eggs; and I was too much shocked to say more. However, these were the tales I heard: "Joe had found a nest on his way to the fields, but 'quite forgot' to look as he came home from work." "Sal had seen some young birds nearly ready to fly, but quite forgot I wanted any!" Some one else had "seen some last week, but quite forgot whereabouts now!" "Uncle Sam saw some young mocking-birds in the orchard, but his wife had quite forgot

to tell him that Miss Jinny wanted some, or he could have caught them easily." "Aunt Mollinty had caught some, and taken them home till next morning, but forgot to shut out the cat, so she ate them all up!" Another had "got some, but couldn't find a'ry child to bring 'em down to the house, so the birds all died."

'Why, it was worse than if no nests at all had been found!' said Duncan. 'I never thought anybody could be so stupid as those negroes were.'

'No; it is hard to believe the intense stupidity and thoughtlessness of the poor creatures. But *we*, untaught, might have been as bad. "Quite forgot" was the regular excuse for not thinking; and "quite forgot" was always considered a reasonable excuse. Two or three birds' nests I found myself; and, whenever I could escape the eyes of the little darkies, stole away to watch the progress of the nestlings,—happy enough if I found them safe, but too often to find the nest destroyed.'

'There was in the kitchen garden a sort of arbour or wide arch of trellis-work, covered over with a grape vine; and as the negro children were not allowed to go into this garden—otherwise the gooseberry bushes and strawberry beds would have been cleared in a very short space of time—great was my satisfaction one day to find a mocking-bird's nest snug among the large and luxuriant leaves of the vine. Increased vigilance was enforced to secure the garden from negro depredations, or my nest would surely be discovered. Phil, who worked under the gardener, was sent to the stables for a time, in order that my nest

should remain unmolested. There were five eggs, which from the season I judged must be nearly ready to hatch ; and most anxiously I watched them, creeping to the place when no eyes were upon me, like a child doing something naughty, and afraid to be seen ; for though the little blackamoors dared not follow me into the garden, one could not prevent their running to the fence and peeping through.'

'While awaiting the appearance of those precious bird-lings, judge of my horror one morning on being told that an Aunt Georgina had found a young mocking-bird, and taken it home for her baby to play with !'

'A *live* one, Aunt Jenny? A live mocking-bird for the baby to pull about ! Oh-h !'

'Yes, Maggie ; a live bird ! And I trying so hard to obtain one. But of course Aunt Georgina had "quite forgot," as usual. Regardless of the broiling heat, away I ran, half a mile and more, to Aunt Georgina's cabin, but only to find it locked and barred : she had gone to the fields to work. I left word with a neighbour—the old negress who took care of all the babies—that I would trim a hat for the child, if its mother would bring or send down the young bird to me as soon as she came home from work. Alas ! a vain message, for the poor old crone never gave another thought to the bird ; and when next morning I again hurried up to the cottage, "the rats had eaten it," the old woman told me !'

'Oh auntie, please !' entreated Maggie, clinging to her aunt's arm ; 'I think I would rather not hear any more

just now ; it makes me so unhappy.' And poor Maggie was nearly crying.

'Well, it is an awful bother for all those stupid negroes to keep forgetting everything !' returned Duncan. 'But *do* let Aunt Jenny tell the rest, Maggie, about those in the harbour, you know.'

'But if Maggie would really rather not hear any more to-day, suppose we talk of something else, Dunny ; and I can tell you another time ? For I grieve to say that there are more sad than pleasant things to relate about the mocking-birds.'

'Never mind, Aunt Jenny, if Dunny wishes to hear about them. Please go on.'

'A young bird, it appeared, and particularly a bright-coloured one, was considered a capital toy for the black babies, who, I must confess, had little enough to amuse them beyond what nature provided. Poor little mortals ! And this fancy of theirs was a fortunate discovery for me. Finery beyond anything else is prized by the negroes ; so I found out this Aunt Georgina, and told her what I would have given for the bird, promising to make a hat or a bonnet for her baby, and to bring some other kinds of toys, if she would find me another. The mother's pride was gratified ; and forthwith she went round boasting of her expected reward, and her certainty of being able to claim it very soon. "Laws-a-me !" exclaimed one of the other aunties to me, "an' thar's Milly got a young bird now what she brung home to-day for her babby." You may be sure that on hearing this I was not long in finding out

where this Aunt Milly lived, and in hastening to the place. Fortunately she was at home, and the offer of a red ribbon proved irresistible. Exultingly lifting a saucer from off a small basin, as if she were keeping flies from the sugar, there lay a poor, unhappy little half-fledged mocking-bird—a real one this time—cold and hungry, at the bottom of it. As soon as it was exposed to daylight, it sprawled and shook on the cold, shiny floor of its uncomfortable prison, and opened its great yellow mouth, squeaking for food. Of course I immediately warmed and fed it, and carried it home to nurse, and it soon revived. Next day, in consequence of the promised finery to the black aunties, my feathered family increased rapidly,—three thrushes already, and a mocking-bird, a jay, and three red birds; the latter being what I so much wished for.'

'Jolly! jolly! Were you not glad?' exclaimed the enthusiastic children. 'How big were the red birds?' 'What sort of a jay was it?' 'Did the mocking-bird live?' 'Were the ——'.

'Which of all these questions must be answered first?' cried Aunt Jenny, laughing; 'for we have not much time left, you know.'

'The mocking-bird! the mocking-bird! Was it one of those out of the arbour?'

'No; those were not yet hatched. I don't know where the auntie got her young bird; but when I asked for the rest, she said "there were no more," she was sure. But you could never believe anything the negroes told you.

However, Milly had her red ribbon ; and Aunt Georgina's baby had a new hat for a sparrow which she brought me a few days afterwards.'

'A sparrow !' cried Duncan contemptuously. 'What was the use of a sparrow ?'

'Ah, but it was very different from our common English sparrows. It was a sweet little bird ; only, I will not stop to describe it to you now. Maggie, just think of Aunt Jenny turning milliner for a week or two ! Indeed I did : trimming hats and bonnets, and making up all sorts of finery for the black aunties in return for the young birds they brought me.'

'Then you had quite a jolly good lot at the last ?'

'Yes, Duncan ; but not all such as I could keep. For instance, a young partridge was brought me, and several more jays and thrushes, and some others which were of no use ; and then ——'

'Then there were the fine eggs in the arbour !' suggested Maggie. 'How many were hatched ?'

'Oh Maggie dear ! How shall I tell you about those five little birds ? Yes, they were all hatched ; but ——'

'But what ? Tell us quickly. What !'

'Well,' replied Miss Morton sadly, 'Phil got into the garden,—he had watched me through the fence,—got in on the sly, discovered my nest, and—that's all I can tell you.'

At the recollection of the nest in the arbour, Miss Morton gave an involuntary shudder, and stopped suddenly, and in an instant the children's imaginations were

busy; but to check inquiries she hastily changed the subject, and brightly asked: 'But what do you think some young ladies in Philadelphia wrote to me in answer to my letter to tell them I had three tame thrashers for them? "Don't plague yourself about the *thrashers*; we can get plenty here. It is never worth while to bring them such a distance if they are not mocking-birds." Just think of that! And I not to be aware that they were common in the north as well as the south. But you know I had not thought much about birds or kept any myself until I began to rear them for my northern friends; so you must not laugh at Aunt Jenny's stupidity.'

'*We* don't think it was a bit stupid, do we, Dunny?' said Maggie, speaking for herself and her brother. 'For of course, Aunt Jenny, when you went about visiting people in the big towns, you could not be watching the wild birds all day; could she, Dunny?'

'No,' said Dunny encouragingly. '*We* don't know *half* the thrushes in England, do we, Maggie? Jim told me the other day, though, that he knows lots of thrushes—kinds that I never noticed. At least in my natural history books there are pictures of them; but—— Then what did you do with your three little thrashers, Aunt Jenny?'

'Well, after receiving that letter, and having so many additions to my family of birds, I thought it best to set two of the three at liberty. They ate enormously, and required more attention than I could well spare them. Being bold, strong birds, able to take care of themselves, I thought this the kindest thing that could be done for'

them. So I carried them a long way out into the woods and let them fly. They watched me and kept near me, and I tossed them up high into a tree several times to accustom them to their freedom; then I found some grubs and worms and placed them within sight; and when the two little thrashers appeared to be more at home in that new world, I slipped behind a tree and so got away.'

'But, auntie, with one of their wings clipped how could they fly?' asked Dunny.

'The wing, you must remember, was clipped before the feathers were fully grown; and by this time the difference in the two wings was scarcely perceptible. That evening I went back to the place, and called to them for a long time, but they were nowhere to be seen; so I hope, poor little things, they had been able to fly where they chose, and to take care of themselves.'

'And their little brother?'

'That being rather delicate, I kept it a few weeks longer, letting it do pretty much as it liked, and take its chance, to accustom it to liberty; but it seemed timid and more attached to me, and would never go out of my sight. At last, what with my red birds, the jay, the sparrow, the mocking-bird, and another, a little yellow bird, which required an immense deal of care, the thrasher was rather in the way. No one would have it to keep in a cage; so one morning I took it into the woods, and after practising it in flying, by tossing it up into the trees, I set it on a log where were a quantity of ants and ants' eggs,

which it could easily pick up, and there I left it at its breakfast.'

'You have not told us what that other little bird was—the yellow one?'

'Ah, that was the tiniest, sweetest little ball of feathers you can imagine. In colour it was like a canary, but so extremely small I was almost afraid to handle it. It was nearly full fledged, but not able to fly far; and was picked up at the foot of a tree out of which it must have fallen. Happily it was seen by one of the servants, who caught it and brought it to me before Mrs. Puss espied it. Excepting a humming-bird, I never saw so wee a birdie in my life. To-morrow, if we have time, I can tell you more about it, and also the red birds. You now know something of the poor negroes, as well as something of the thrush family; and you will no longer wonder that Aunt Jenny should have brought home only two birds.'

'No, indeed!' cried Maggie; 'we had not the least idea how hard it is to get pet birds in America—at least in those places where there are such numbers of negroes. And I thank you very, very much, dear Aunt Jenny, for telling us so many interesting things about your American pets. Oh, I do so wish Dunny was not going to school, and that our holidays were not yet over, and I do so wish you were not going away so soon, dear, *dear* Aunt Jenny! But you *will* come back to Mortonfield before you go to America for good, won't you?'

'I vote for Aunt Jenny to come here when I come home for the Easter holidays,' added Duncan. 'By then

I shall have a young thrush of my own,—Jim says he's certain to catch one,—and I shall want Aunt Jenny to tell me lots more things about birds. But, Aunt Jenny, I vote that to-morrow you tell us a ghost story for a change. You would like that, would not you, Mag?'

Maggie said yes, she would like it very much ; but Aunt Jenny said she was afraid ghost stories were not so much in her line, but she would try to think of something to tell them by way of variety, should time permit.

The party had now arrived at home, and Duncan had to go round and fasten up Cæsar ; which he did, thinking, as he ran along, of the thrushes, and the negroes, and that horrid boy Phil (though Jim himself had been known to swallow the contents of the eggs which he sucked), and of the young thrush to be added to his bird family next spring, and of the many things which he intended to do next Easter.





CHAPTER XII.

THE GHOST OF THE NESTINGS.

YOU must thank Fuzzy for the little story I am now going to relate,' said Aunt Jenny, the next evening—the last evening they were all going to spend together for a long time, if ever; and when were gathered round the drawing-room fire papa, mamma—everybody but baby. 'For it was Fuzzy who reminded me of it. But you must not ask me in what way she reminded me, as perhaps you will find out for yourselves when you have heard it.

'It is a ghost story, with a rather sad and serious beginning. But as it is a perfectly true story, I will relate it precisely as it happened, in order that you may see how people—even sensible and good people—may sometimes be deceived by appearances; and how objects, seen in an indistinct light, may assume shapes which, in accordance with the bent of our own thoughts, we conclude to be something entirely different.

'This story will also convince you of the importance of examining into the cause of any strange sight which may

alarm or puzzle you, and which, in describing to others, might give weak and ignorant persons encouragement to believe in spectres, spirits, and all such unreal objects.

‘On the banks of a large, wide river in Virginia, called the Rappahannock, there is an estate known as The Nestings.’

‘You do have such heathenish names over there, Jenny,’ said Mr. Morton. ‘What on earth is the meaning of that word or river—Rap-a-something or somebody?’

‘Rappa-hannock? It is one word: an Indian name, the meaning of which no one in the neighbourhood could inform me. There is a town on its banks of a similar sound and termination,—Tappa-hannock,—which doubtless, like the other, has a meaning, as all the Indian names have; but what it is, I am sorry to be unable to inform you. The Nestings is of course English; and from its name you would imagine it to be a sequestered spot, embosomed in trees, hidden like the nest of a bird in the depths of the forest. Secluded it is, and covered with trees. Groves of oak and lofty pines hide the mansion from the passenger on the passing steamboat. But its privacy is owing rather to the waters than to the woods; for The Nestings is a complete island, formed by the two branches of another river, which, by dividing before it reaches the Rappahannock, leaves a triangular piece of land, which might as reasonably be termed The Angles as The Nestings.

‘In the spring of 1861 the terrible disease diphtheria raged fearfully in that part of Virginia, depriving many fond parents of their darling children. The Nestings did

not escape the epidemic. The five children of the owner, Colonel Forrest, were one after the other attacked by it, and in less than a week every one of the five was carried to its grave.'

Colonel and Mrs. Forrest being intimate friends of the American Mortons, the little people had to control their impatience while inquiries and sympathies were being expressed between their parents and their aunt for those deeply afflicted parents in Virginia.

'With the children departed the life and joy of The Nestings. The heart-broken mother, thus rendered suddenly childless, was plunged into such inconsolable grief, that Colonel Forrest thought she also would die in her anguish of weeping. To add to his own distress, on the very day when his last child was buried, a new and sudden alarm arose,—an alarm which compelled him to carry his wife away immediately from her beautiful though saddened home. This new danger was owing to the frightful war in America, of which you have lately heard. That very week, when Colonel and Mrs. Forrest were nursing and grieving over their dying children, the enemy's great ships of war came into the Rappahannock River; and the very day on which the last child of the five was put into its grave, the great war-ships steamed up to within sight of The Nestings.

'Now it happened that Colonel Forrest was well known to be one of those Virginians who were prepared to fight against "the Yankees," as he called the Northerners; therefore the latter had come up the river, threatening

to fire great cannon-balls into his house from their war-steamers. This was the reason why the Colonel, in great alarm and haste, carried his wife away to place her in safety with some friends at a distance.'

It was now the children who interrupted, with exclamations of terror and alarm, and eager questions regarding the war and the Yankees, and how very dreadful it must be to have 'great big, red-hot cannon-balls coming through the house.'

'Yes indeed. What with losing all their children, and the fear of now losing their home and property besides, they were plunged into bitter grief indeed.

'On the evening of the day of Colonel and Mrs. Forrest's escape from The Nestings, an old friend, knowing nothing either of the deaths in the family or of the approach of the Yankee war-ships, arrived from a distant part of Virginia on a visit. This was a good and kind old gentleman, who was in the habit of coming thus unexpectedly, and without invitation, being welcome at all times. He had been an immense favourite with the children of the family, and came, as usual, loaded with presents of toys and sweets for them. Judge then of his surprise and grief when he learned from the negro servants that the five beloved little ones were now cold in their graves,—that his dear friends, Colonel and Mrs. Forrest, were, alas, *childless*! Moreover, that they had gone away from home, no one knew wherefore and whither.

'The old gentleman had come a long way—much too far to think of returning home that night; besides which,

there had been a good deal of rain of late, and this had made the streams full and rapid, and dangerous to ford after dark ; so there was no choice for him but to remain at the solitary Nestings. As for the Yankee gunboats, they did not alarm him any more than they did the poor negroes, who were not very well informed about public affairs. The old gentleman was too merciful and tender-hearted to suspect the possibility of persons—even if enemies—occupying themselves in firing cannon-balls into a house full of innocent beings, especially in the night ; so, although the negroes pointed out the big ships as a wonderful sight, he did not concern himself much about them.

‘The faithful old negress who was the housekeeper, and had been chief nurse, considered herself responsible, in her master’s absence, for the entertainment and comfort of his guests. Therefore, in order to beguile the time, she conducted the visitor from room to room while describing to him the sad events that had lately transpired in each. It would have been wiser in the black “mammy,” as she was called (the middle-aged ones are “aunty,” and the old ones are “mammy”), to have supplied the gentleman with a pile of newspapers to beguile his time, but negroes are always given to relating dismal stories ; and the visitor, interested as he was, could not help encouraging her by questions, yet growing more and more sad as he listened, and everywhere beheld traces of the little ones—their toys and garments—amidst a general disorder, consequent upon the hurried flight of the afflicted parents.

‘Having at length heard all that the old nurse had to tell of the last words and looks of each sick child whom she had lovingly tended, the visitor retired to his chamber. It was a large and commodious room, presenting a more cheerful appearance than any of those through which he had passed—with the one exception, that a child’s cradle, standing near the fireplace, looked, with its coverlet thrown loosely over it, as if the baby might still be sleeping there; a sight which served to fix the mind of the beholder upon the little innocent so lately occupying it, but now cold in the grave. A pile of logs blazed brightly upon the hearth, and in the middle of the room was a table covered with books and writing materials; a large easy-chair, illuminated by the crackling logs, looked cosy and inviting; the bed occupied a corner farthest removed from the fire.

‘The visitor sat down in the easy-chair, and opening first one and then another of the books, found the names of the children inscribed in most of them. On the first leaf of a large family Bible he also found a record of their names, with the dates of their birth; and to this list were now to be added the dates of their deaths!

‘You will easily understand that all these things gave rise to many sad and solemn reflections in the mind of the tender-hearted old gentleman, who was already grieving so deeply for his afflicted friends; and as he leaned back in his easy-chair, he fell into a reverie,—the events of his own childhood, the childhood of Colonel and Mrs. Forrest (whom he had known all their lives), the births, and now the burials, of their little ones; events connected with the

past, the present, and the future, all flitting rapidly through his brain, as he sat there opposite the cradle.

‘His chamber was in a wing of the house quite away from the part occupied by the negro servants; and as it was now growing late, a perfect stillness reigned throughout the establishment. The tired visitor, musing in his easy-chair, and with his eyes still fixed upon the cradle, began to picture to himself the tender infant lately occupying it as now transformed into a living angel; and gradually, as his eyes grew dim and his thoughts indistinct, the infant angel seemed to be hovering over him: and thus he dozed off to sleep, mingling his dreams with his waking fancies, and peopling the chamber with the spirits of the departed children.

‘Suddenly he was awakened by what seemed to be the low, wailing cry of an infant close to him. He started up, looking towards the cradle, from whence the cry seemed to have proceeded. The candle had burnt out, and the wood fire was so low, that only the indistinct outline of the cradle could now be perceived. All was silent there. Within the house not a sound could be heard; and without, all nature seemed hushed in sleep. After listening intently, our old friend concluded that the cry must have been a part of his dreams, originating only in his own weary brain; therefore, assisted by the glimmer of the dying embers, he now sought his bed.

‘Scarcely had he closed his eyes before the same cry was repeated, accompanied by what seemed to be a movement in the cradle, as if caused by the disturbed slumbers of an

infant. Again he started up, when he even fancied he could hear a breathing; but after listening intently for a few minutes, and perfect silence prevailing, he endeavoured to convince himself that the sounds (for now he was quite certain that there *had* been sounds) were caused by a draught of air rustling the window curtains behind the cradle; and once more he composed himself to sleep.

‘A third time he was aroused by the low, wailing cry,—this time sufficiently prolonged and distinct as to leave not the slightest doubt of its proceeding from the cradle, as he had in the first instance supposed.

‘The old gentleman had been rendered unusually nervous and sensitive by his midnight meditations in this house of death, and by his dreams of the little children as angels,—dreams which he now fancied were about to be realized, and that, in fact, nothing less than the spirit of the dead baby was hovering about the cradle. At any other time he would have known better; but when people are worn out and excited by any great emotion, their brains are not in a condition to reason clearly, over-fatigue and mental agitation often causing a sort of delirium—enough, that is, to confuse their ideas. Thus it was now with our weary traveller, who confounded his dreams with the singular sounds proceeding from the cradle; and, filled with religious awe, he arose and solemnly approached the spot.

‘Just then a half-burnt log of wood resting on the andirons fell in halves upon the hearth, and burst into a flame again, casting a light full upon the cradle. The astonished visitor could now distinctly see the coverlet rise and sink

as with the regular breathings of a sleeper. Moreover, he discerned what seemed to be an infant's head enveloped in a soft white cap or hood, the fringe of which lay loosely over the pillow. Strangely bewildered and filled with awe, he stood gazing at it; and as he gazed, he came to the solemn conclusion that it could be nothing less than the spirit of the dead baby.

'Presently the form gently stirs, as if about to rise; and already in his fancy the old gentleman sees it as he had seen it in his dreams, floating above the cradle. "Ah! —yes!" he reverently murmured; "the spirit of the departed innocent is manifesting itself to me!" And you, Dunny and Maggie, will admit that it really was a most strange spectacle, to behold a small delicate form, all draped in white, rising from a cradle in the middle of the night, when the beholder knew that no child was there, and that not another soul was in the house but himself and the black servants.'

'Oh-h!' cried Maggie and Freddy. 'What could it be?'

'But what really was it, Aunt Jenny?' asked Duncan, with his eyes almost as round and as full of wonderment as the younger children's were.

'Well, you'll see,' resumed Aunt Jenny. 'While standing there in solemn expectation, the weak flame of the dull log gradually diminished, and the glimmering barely enabled him to distinguish the outline of the figure clothed in soft white drapery as it moved slowly—slowly —arose—and noiselessly approached the foot of the

cradle. "Now it will mount into the air!" said the wonder-stricken visitor to himself. "Now it will ascend—and—! What!" All of a sudden the tender form shakes violently—barking, it leaps to the floor—it is snapping the visitor's legs! Flossy—poor forgotten little Flossy, the tiny white poodle—awoke from her long sleep, set up a vigorous barking, which, with her bold attack upon the visitor's ankles, proved beyond doubt that flesh and blood, and no ghost, was present. But a very good ghost indeed had Flossy made. Her long silky coat had been the soft white drapery, her little pink nose had in the uncertain glimmer been transformed into a very palpable face, and her long ears had looked exactly like the soft hood or cap with its fringe spread over the pillow.

The children clapped their hands with glee when their aunt came to this, and then tried to arrange Fuzzy on the hearth-rug into the supposed form of Flossy, stretching and smoothing her ears to the utmost, much to the disturbance of Fuzzy's dreams. But it was of no use: Fuzzy was not Flossy, and the result was unsatisfactory.

'Then was that your very own real little Flossy that you have left in Philadelphia, Aunt Jenny?' cried Maggie.

'The very same. Colonel and Mrs. Forrest sent word that I was to have her if I would accept of her, and she has been my own little pet Flossy ever since. I was staying in Virginia at that time, and the old gentleman himself told all this to me. "Now, you see," said he, as he concluded his story, "if I had run away out of the room in a fright, I should never have known what caused that noise in the

their improvement and enjoyment by every means in her power. Duncan had come home from school at mid-summer, a stout, healthy, manly boy, wonderfully improved in every way; and Freddy's respect for him had increased proportionately. At Michaelmas, also, he had been home for a short time, and the younger children were now looking forward to the Christmas holidays and to his being again among them, with a delight and anticipation hitherto unknown to them. Not a little did the presence of their aunt increase these happy expectations. Very dear and very important had Miss Morton become to her little nephews and nieces; and so charming a knack had she of providing entertainment, that they felt quite sure of spending a happy winter, even in spite of papa's and mamma's absence.

It was now the middle of November. Mr. and Mrs. Duncan Morton had arrived at Mentone, and had sent back to the party at home a long and amusing account of their journey. After an unusually fine and prolonged autumn, wet weather was setting in; the croquet hoops and balls had just been safely packed away for the winter; gardening and fishing and all other summer amusements were at an end; and the little Mortons—true children of nature that they were—found it rather difficult to settle themselves down to in-door occupations. Maggie, perhaps, was less at a loss, because, besides spending more time in the schoolroom than Freddy, she had, in addition to her studies, the chief charge of the bird-room; but poor little Freddy, thinking himself quite too big to play in the

nursery, and finding himself quite too little to do half what Duncan did, but which he attempted to do nevertheless, spent many a dull half-hour waiting for Maggie or for Aunt Jenny to help him amuse himself.

One day when, not being very well, he had escaped from the schoolroom after a little make-believe study, he ran down to Aunt Jenny, confident in her ability to make the afternoon pass happily, but found her so busily engaged in letter-writing, that there was no hope of getting anything out of her. She took time, however, to give him a kiss, and to tell him that if she were undisturbed her letters would not occupy her long, but that they were of much consequence, and must be finished for that day's mail.

It was raining so fast that poor Freddy could not go out, so he dawdled into the hall to look for amusement there, and finding none, came back to the library to coax Fuzzy for a game; but Fuzzy preferred to finish her nap in front of the fire, so Freddy sauntered round the room, jolting the writing-table, and taking up first one thing and then another, but finding pleasure in none of them.

'Oh, how I do wish I could go out!' said he dolefully, as he leaned against the library window, and, with his elbows on the sill and his cheeks in his hands, looked out upon the bushes, drip, drip, dripping with rain. 'Aunt Jenny, there's a little bird on the iron railing that I do believe I could catch as e-e-easily as—as anything. He has been sitting there ever such a long time all in the rain, and he doesn't seem to mind it a bit. And he is

not a bit wetter, either. May I just run out and get him; Aunt Jenny?’

‘No, my dear Freddy,’ said Aunt Jenny, looking up from the letter she was writing; ‘certainly not in this pouring rain. You had a long ride this morning, and have been caught in the rain once already to-day. You must content yourself in-doors this afternoon. Besides, your little bird would fly off long before you got across the lawn.’

‘Oh, I do wish the rain would leave off,’ whined Freddy. ‘He is quite a tame little bird, Aunt Jenny. He is not a robin, nor yet a sparrow. How funny of him to sit out there in the rain! Aunt Jenny, is not it strange that little birds don’t get wet through and drowned in all this rain? Why don’t they? There! Now he is shaking himself.’

‘Just as Martha shook your waterproof coat when you came in from your ride this morning, and just as Taffy shook his coat as soon as you got off him. The reason why little birds do not get wet, is because they wear waterproof coats like you and Taffy.’

Freddy looked hard at his little bird, and then turned round and looked hard at his aunt, and then burst out laughing. ‘Aunt Jenny, birds don’t wear coats—only feathers.’

‘Well, and are not feathers a bird’s coat as much as fur is a cat’s coat, and hair is your pony’s coat? There is something in the nature of fur and hair and feathers which causes the wet to roll off instead of soaking into the skin. If it were not so, what a miserable life the

poor dumb creatures would lead in rainy weather and in winter! They would be always getting wet through, and be shivering with cold, and then become ill and die.'

'It is a lucky thing for them that they can shake the rain off so easily. Don't you think so, Aunt Jenny? There! Now he has gone on to the laurel-bush; he is tired of being in the rain. No: there he flies again all through it. What a lucky thing it is that the birds never get wet!'

'It is "lucky" indeed, if you think of it in that way. But the truth is, it is not by accident or by chance that the birds keep their feathers dry; but it is entirely through the wisdom and goodness of God, who has provided them with that sort of covering. Their being "lucky," as my little Freddy calls it, is only a proof that our heavenly Father cares for little birds as He cares for the rest of His creatures.'

'Don't the little birds ever get wet, then?' said Freddy, turning to the window again. 'Yes; there is one now, down on the gravel walk—oh! so wet, and his wings are all dropping down and draggled. Oh! Aunt Jenny, do come down and look. I think he is ill.'

Miss Morton good-naturedly left her writing to come to the window. Freddy had, in consequence of the weather, been disappointed of a promised walk this afternoon, and he was now waiting for Maggie to finish her lessons and come and have a game with him. 'If the bird looks dull and untidy, you may be sure it is not well,' said Miss Morton. 'Yes, poor little thing, it is a young swallow, and

there are two or three more among the shrubs. No wonder they look miserable: their friends and relations have all gone off to a warmer climate, and left them behind.'

'I thought *all* the swallows always go away when summer is over?'

'As a rule, they do. But sometimes a few of the younger birds are not sufficiently strong on the wing to fly so far, and these wait behind, till suddenly some frosty nights surprise the poor little things, and kill the few remaining insects which they would like to have caught, and they have not strength enough to set out on their long journey to a warmer country.'

'And then do the poor little swallows die, auntie?'

'Most of them do, I fear, Freddy. But sometimes they have been known to hide in holes in a cliff or a bank, and remain there in a half-torpid or insensible state; and if the winter does not happen to be very severe, they may live until spring. Some few have been found in France or Spain, as if they had dropped down with fatigue, while their stronger companions had proceeded to Africa, or wherever food and sunshine enticed them to winter. See how unhappy that poor little birdie looks, with his long wings drooping to the ground! The insects which he would like for his supper are all dead, and he is chilled and terrified by this rough, wet weather.'

'But, Aunt Jenny, you said he could shake off the wet?'

'Well, you see his head and back are not very wet. I meant that the rain does not soak through the coats of birds and animals as it does through our clothes, and that,

generally speaking, they can keep themselves pretty dry. This wet swallow only proves what I said at first,—that when birds look dragged and untidy, you may be sure they are not in perfect health. That poor little bird has had no chance of a dinner to-day, therefore he is in no mood to comb and dress himself. But I will tell you more about their waterproof coats by and by, as now I *must* finish my letters. Can you not find a book to amuse yourself with until Maggie has finished her lessons?’

‘Do not you think it is going to leave off raining, auntie?’ Freddy repeated in a discontented tone.

‘Even if it should, it will be too late for you to go out any more to-day, Freddy. It will soon be dark, and you must content yourself in-doors.’

Freddy had not yet learned the happy art of amusing himself, and he thought he had had enough of books for that day; so he dragged a chair to the window, and knelt upon it, resting his chin upon his arms to gaze out again upon the falling, falling rain. The wisest plan is not to think of things that annoy us, but to try to think of something entirely different; so that the disagreeables—whatever they may be—may not render us more unhappy than they need do. But Freddy unwisely fixed all his thoughts upon the rain, and upon the things he could not do on account of it, instead of the many things which he could do, and might have done, all this while,—things which would have made the afternoon pass pleasantly, instead of slowly and dismally. So, instead of becoming more cheerful, he grew more and more dissatisfied. ‘Oh, how I *do*

wish the rain would leave off!—how I *do* wish winter would not come!’ he murmured every now and then. Presently—quite forgetting that his aunt was in haste to finish her letters for the post—he exclaimed, ‘I wish you would tell us some more about your American pets, like those stories you told us last winter. You promised you would. You promised to tell us how you got the nests, and about the little negro children, and about the young birds that had no mother, and about—oh! lots of things.’

‘Did I, Freddy?’ said Aunt Jenny, looking up kindly from her writing again. ‘Then I am sure it will give me great pleasure to do so,—particularly if I promised. But, to tell the truth, I thought you had grown rather tired of the bird stories.’

‘Oh no, auntie; indeed we were not tired of them at all. Only ——’

‘Only you have all found other amusements during the summer which you liked better. Was that it?’

‘Why, Aunt Jenny,’ said Freddy, coming coaxingly up to his aunt, ‘you know we have such lots of things to do all the summer. Our gardens, for one thing. Then there’s croquet, and cricket, and fishing, and—oh! lots of things. And then Miss Bernard makes me do more lessons now; so I never get any time at all scarcely in the house to do as I like—I mean, for puzzles and such things.’

‘What! Not with two whole hours to yourself this afternoon? What a number of puzzles you could have put together! You do not look as if you had been very badly used, Freddy, with those plump, red cheeks of yours.

You have had some very happy times out-of-doors during the summer, and now you will enjoy your winter amusements all the more. If it were always summer, where would be the delights of Christmas-trees, and Christmas-parties, and New Year's gifts, and fireside stories? And what would be the use of that charming pair of skates which your papa bought you last winter? Then, too, you would lose your pleasant walks in spring, when you go digging up scented-violet roots and ferns, and hunting for birds' nests. And you would lose the immense satisfaction of setting out your croquet hoops for the first croquet-party! No, my dear boy, each month and each season brings its own uses and its own pleasures; and you enjoy them all the more from having been deprived of them for a time. Don't you think you do?'

Freddy still looked a little doubtful about the pleasures of bad weather.

'But now,' added Aunt Jenny, 'I positively *must* finish my letters, or they will be quite too late. Run up to the nursery, and have a romp with the little ones. They, too, have been disappointed of their walk to-day; so you must be a man, and make it up to them by helping them in their games till tea-time. Afterwards we will find out if Maggie really wants to hear more of my American stories. If so, as soon as Duncan comes home, we will fix upon some regular time and place, so that we may not be interrupted.'

Freddy was an affectionate little boy, only he did not enjoy being left to himself; and he now wondered he had

not thought of his puzzles before, or of the nursery games; and he went skipping across the room to the door, half singing in reply to his aunt's words: 'A nice time and place for the bird stories—a nice time and place; and I'll go and tell Ellie and nursie.' And off he ran.

'Oh Aunt Jenny! dear Aunt Jenny!' exclaimed Maggie, running down as soon as she got clear from lessons; 'Freddy says you are going to tell us some more stories about your American pets! I do so love to hear about them; and I do so want to know how you managed to feed that little, tiny, wee, wee birdie which fell out of the tree, and what became of the little thrush which you left on a log out in the woods. Oh! and Ellie wants to hear the stories too. May not she come, Aunt Jenny? She says she will sit very still indeed while you are telling them.'

Ellie was still one of the nursery-party, but she was six years old, and very ambitious of doing precisely what the elder children did, and thought herself quite old enough to learn about birds and flowers, and all the pretty things of which Aunt Jenny told them.

'Certainly, little Ellie can come, and Percy too, for that matter,' cried Aunt Jenny merrily. 'But they will soon be tired of sitting still.'

'Now, Aunt Jenny? Shall I call them now?' And without waiting for a reply, off ran Maggie, shouting for 'Freddy, Ellie, Percy;' and soon a great pattering of feet was heard above stairs, and down came first Freddy, then Ellie, and, last of all, little fat Percy, who had to bring down one foot after the other,—lump, lump, one step at a

time,—and hold tightly on to the bannisters all the while ; but, proud of his skill in reaching the bottom in safety, there he stood at the door, grinning like Jack Horner in his corner, as if saying to himself, ‘What a brave boy am I!’

‘Oh! The tea-bell!—that tiresome, stupid tea-bell!’ cried the children. ‘And just as we’ve all got ready!’

‘Oh, but there will be time for just one story! Won’t there, Aunt Jenny?’ pleaded Freddy. ‘Miss Bernard always takes five or six minutes to make the tea and all that.’

‘Yes, for the wee, wee birdie,’ said Maggie.

‘Or for the way they make their waterproof coats,’ said Freddy.

‘My darlings, I am sorry ; but to-day there is only just time enough to tell you of a nice little plan I have thought of. Come here and listen.’

Aunt Jenny sat down on an ottoman, and the four children gathered round her. Four pairs of eyes were fixed eagerly on her face, and four pairs of hands were tusselling for the possession of hers.

‘Well now, listen,’ she said as she collected all the hands in a heap on her lap and held them there. ‘Freddy spent a very dull hour this afternoon grieving over the rain, for the want of something better to do. And you, Maggie, were nearly an hour later than usual with your lessons, were you not?’

‘Oh well, you see, Aunt Jenny, we could not go out ; and so ——’

‘Exactly. And so you thought there was no need to be quick. But then you lost the satisfaction of feeling that

you had been diligent, and had done your best ; and you lost the opportunity of amusing yourselves in any way that you chose ; and you also deprived Miss Bernard of the opportunity of resting and amusing herself as *she* chose. Do you not think she would have been glad to read a book or to write her letters all that hour ?'

'I never thought of that,' said Maggie. 'I don't think she minded it. Oh yes, now I remember she did say after dinner that she would write some letters because we should not be able to have our walk. And she was writing them when I came down.'

'But not in time for the post,' said Aunt Jenny. 'So you see, my dear children, you not only deprive yourselves of enjoyment, but others also. And you will think of this another time, will you not ?'

'I will ! I will !' cried both ; for they were kind, affectionate children, who really liked to please their governess, when they happened to discover any particular wish of hers which they could gratify.

'But rainy days are such tiresome days, auntie,' said Freddy.

'Rainy days are such convenient days, Freddy,' returned auntie.

'For what ? for what ?' exclaimed the children, nearly tugging off their aunt's fingers in their eagerness.

'For talking about pet birds, and telling ghost stories, and ——'

'Oh yes, we never thought of that !' cried a chorus of voices. And now there was no keeping the pile of hands

imprisoned any longer ; and Aunt Jenny might have been torn in pieces in the midst of the jumping, tugging, loving, noisy children, had not Miss Bernard come in at the moment to tell them tea was ready. So Aunt Jenny struck up a bargain ; namely, that whenever they got through lessons quickly enough on rainy afternoons, to have a good hour before tea-time, they should come to her in her room, where she would promise to answer all the questions they might like to ask.'

And now, instead of disliking the rainy days, they almost wished to-morrow would be wet, or at least 'the afternoon part of it ;' and were full of promises and good resolutions, so that they might hear some more of Aunt Jenny's American bird stories.

Directly after tea, Maggie got out the pretty little writing-case which had been her aunt's Christmas present, and sat down to compose a letter to Duncan, to inform him that Aunt Jenny was going to resume the bird stories, and that Ellie was to be one of the party ; but that Duncan need not be afraid of losing anything by not being at home, because Aunt Jenny had promised to save all the best ones till he came back ; for there were 'lots of things to explain, that Freddy and Ellie do not understand as well as *we* do, you know, Dunny.' Oh she did so long him to come home ; for his thrush, she verily believed, had learned to imitate some of Bully's notes since she had hung them both in the same window. Next she told him what a quantity of canary feathers she had saved to show him, or he never could believe that three little birds had

'moulted such numbers ;' but now, in their new feathers, they did look lovely, and were as bonnie as ever. The wonderful tameness of Podgie of late, and also Dor's extraordinary intelligence in coming out of his nest the moment he heard Maggie open the door of his cage, and the dexterity with which he took a nut from her fingers, filled nearly a whole page of Maggie's long letter to Duncan ; and which she concluded with fears that Podgie and Dor should roll up into their winter balls before Dunny got home, and congratulations that in seventeen days only he would be at Mortonfield ; for, oh ! such a jolly Christmas they were all going to have with dear, *dear* Aunt Jenny again.

In a very few days back came a letter from Duncan. He was so glad that Aunt Jenny was going to stay all the winter, and hoped there would be a jolly good lot of ice, for it was a jolly lark to go out skating with Aunt Jenny. He was so glad that the canaries had got well over their moulting, and that Maggie had saved all their feathers, because he had got a dodge of making something very particular with just such kinds of feathers. And he was so glad that his thrush was learning of Bully, but most glad of all to hear that Aunt Jenny was going on with the bird stories. Only he wished, 'as a particular favour,' that she would keep all she knew about the American thrushes until he got back ; and also, if she knew any more ghost stories, to be sure and not tell them, for he liked them above all things ; and voted for a jolly good lot of fun this winter.



CHAPTER XIV.

A RAINY AFTERNOON.

SUCH a cosy, happy little party assembled in Miss Morton's room one rainy afternoon, a few days afterwards! Lessons had been got through with the utmost despatch and satisfaction, and Maggie and Freddy had run off joyously to tell the good news to Aunt Jenny, skipping along with that peculiarly happy feeling which is the sure result of having tried to do well. Aunt Jenny was ready for them, and as delighted to keep her promise as the children were to claim it. Ellie also came running in, promising to sit very still indeed; and Percy came because the rest came, though not quite clear as to what the fun was going to be.

Amidst a vast amount of bustle and excitement, a great wide arm-chair was dragged out. Percy was established on Aunt Jenny's knee, and Ellie was tucked back into the corner by her side. Maggie seated herself on a little, low stool, as close as ever she could squeeze; and Freddy sprawled at full length on the floor, in front, resting his chin on his hands, and looking up with the wisdom of a

seal, peeping out of the water. These arrangements sound quiet enough to read about ; but while they were being made, question after question was uttered by the impatient little people, faster by far than eyes can travel over these printed words. 'How many birds had you in all, Aunt Jenny?' 'Who got the nests?' 'Did you climb the trees?' 'Do mocking-birds talk like parrots?' 'Have you thought of a ghost story, auntie?' and a dozen other questions,—till each child began telling somebody else to be quiet, and in so doing made more noise than ever ; excepting Aunt Jenny, who only smiled, and waited.

'Now then!' said she at last, when there was a lull. 'How shall we settle it? Will you each ask me a question in turn? Or shall I begin at the time when I first visited the South?'

'Oh yes, that will be best. *You* make a beginning, Aunt Jenny, dear,' said Maggie.

To this the rest agreed.

'Very well. Then, if either of you wish to ask anything while I am speaking, put up your hand—so. That is the way the American children do when they are in class at school. When I see a hand up, I will stop ; then you can say what you wish.'

'Oh yes! That's a jolly good way,' cried Freddy ; and up went his hand at once. Up went Ellie's hand too, then up went Percy's ; the little ones thinking this was a part of the fun, and setting everybody laughing again.

'Oh, but I have not begun yet!' said Aunt Jenny. 'I mean if, when I am talking, I say anything you do not

understand, then hold out your hand, that I may wait. I shall not mind how often you stop me ; for if you do not ask questions about things which puzzle you, you will not enjoy the story, or be any the wiser for it.'

'All right, Aunt Jenny. Now, please, begin.'

'Well, you know that America is a very large country, divided into a number of smaller countries called States, all having different names,—just as Europe is divided into countries, or England into counties—Norfolk, Suffolk, Yorkshire, and so on. Only the American States are much larger than Yorkshire and Devonshire, some being larger than all England. You know, too, that the Americans all speak the English language, and are very much like the English people in all their ways and ideas.'

'Yes ; Aunt Jenny is like an English lady, is not she ?' said Freddy, quite forgetting all about the hand.

'Yes,' nodded Aunt Jenny, 'most of the American people are like the English, but there are some who are black,—the negroes, you know, who used to be the poor slaves of whom you have heard. They ——'

Here up went Ellie's hand.

'What is it, Ellie ?'

'Do the negroes speak English, auntie ?'

'Not very good English ; but you can understand them. Then there are Indians, who have a language of their own, except those who have lived near enough to the white people to learn theirs. And there are people from Germany and France and Russia, and other countries, living in America, but the general language is English. And

there is a great deal of difference in the climate of so large a country. In some of the States the winters are extremely cold,—as cold as in Norway,—and in other States there is scarcely ever any ice at all. There is also a great difference in the things which grow there, and in the birds and animals and insects which are to be found there. Well, Freddy?’ (for Freddy’s hand was held out).

‘How far are the hot parts from the cold parts?’

‘There is no immediate difference between the hot and the cold States at any part. But if you were travelling steadily towards the South, you would find the climate warmer and warmer by degrees, as we should do were we travelling from Norway to Italy. And if you were travelling northwards, you would find each State cooler and cooler by degrees, and you would observe a gradual change in the vegetation, and—what do you say, my little Ellie?’

‘Aunty, what is egergy-ge-gevation,—that long word you said?’

‘Vegetation?’ replied Aunt Jenny, laughing, and slowly repeating ve-ge-ta-tion.

‘Oh! Now why did you stop Aunt Jenny for that?’ cried Freddy. ‘Any baby can tell that that word means vegetables,—cabbages and potatoes, and such things.’

‘Well, not vegetables only, Freddy; though you are partly right. Besides the vegetables which we eat, vegetation includes trees and plants of all kinds. If you were travelling southwards you would find the sun hotter and hotter, and the trees and plants more abundant and

luxuriant each day, and the birds and insects with a gayer plumage.'

'Then does the sun make things prettier, Aunt Jenny?'

'Why, Freddy!' interrupted Maggie: 'Now *you*'ve asked a silly question; we shall never get to the birds.'

'So far from being a foolish question, Maggie, it shows reflection on Freddy's part. Yes, my dear children, the sun does make things more beautiful. The sun gives light, and life, and heat, and beauty to the world and to everything upon it. Without the sun, nothing could thrive. You see in your own fields and gardens how the earth becomes decked with flowers when the sunny days of spring set in.'

'Yes, dear Aunt Jenny; please now go on,' said Maggie. 'Oh Percy!'

Just at this moment, Percy, who was tired of playing with his aunt's gold pencil-case, plumped down upon Maggie in trying to reach the floor, and then sprawled over Freddy in trying to regain his feet, so down scrambled Ellie to the rescue of Percy; and in the midst of a general hubbub Aunt Jenny called out 'Come in,' to some one who had been knocking at the door several times already.

'If you please'm, the nursery tea is waiting,' said Martha as she opened the door.

Maggie whispered to her aunt, 'Was it not lucky the little ones were sent for, because they interrupted so?'

'On the contrary, dear Maggie, Ellie has been extremely good and quiet, and she need not go unless she wish it. Miss Bernard says she can have her tea in the school-room on the story-telling afternoons.'

So, to her delight, Ellie was permitted to remain ; but Percy, being quite ready for the bread and milk awaiting him up-stairs, was carried off by Martha.

'Poor little Per !' said Miss Morton ; 'if we had not let him come, he might have thought we were cheating him of some fun. He won't care to come again. And now you two must exercise a little more patience ; for remember, all are at liberty to ask questions. And I would rather stop every half-minute, than that you should not understand all I say.'

The three children re-seated themselves cosily ; Ellie packed herself into the big chair with her aunt, and Freddy, as he fetched a stool for himself, said :

'Then, please, Aunt Jenny, I should like to know how far the very coldest part you ever lived at in America was from the very hottest ?'

'More than a thousand miles a great deal.'

'Farther off than papa and mamma are now ?'

'Much, much ; more than twice as far.'

'What a great big country America must be !'

'Yes, it is a very large country indeed ; much larger than Europe, you know.—What, Maggie dear ?'

'Aunt Jenny, what was the name of the coldest State you lived in ?'

'The north of Michigan—*Mi-chi-gan*. Who can spell it ? Spelling a word helps you to remember it.'

'M-i-s-h—and then a "y:" is that right, Aunt Jenny ?' said Freddy.

'According to the sound, that would be right ; but——'

'Is not there a "c" in it?' asked Maggie.

'Yes. A "c," as in rich; only, the "c" is sounded like "s," as in dish.'

'That was what made me put in the "s,"' said Freddy.
'You said Mishy-gan.'

'Yes, now you call it right. Think of dish and dishy——'

'And wish, auntie?' asked Freddy.

'Fish!' shouted Ellie.

'Good for little Ellie!' cried Aunt Jenny, in her pleasant American way. 'Fish and fishy——'

'And a fishy can and Michigan. That makes poetry!' exclaimed Fred. 'Aunt Jenny, the other day when you were gathering flowers, and I came home from fishing, and you wanted to lay the flowers down for a minute, and I said "Put them in my can," you said "No, that's fishy; it will spoil the flowers," did not you?'

'I believe I did.'

'Well; and so when I want to say the name of that cold State, I can think of the fishy can, can't I, and make poetry of it?'

'Fishy can and Michigan—it rhymes admirably!' returned Miss Morton, smiling at Freddy's way of remembering. 'And now you are not likely to forget where Aunt Jenny spent some of the pleasantest summers of her life. Wish or dish or fish will help you equally well to remember the sound of Michigan; only, when you write the word, be sure to put a "c" instead of the "s."'

Maggie and Freddy spelt and pronounced Michigan correctly, then Ellie tried and succeeded.

'Now we know it,' they exclaimed, well pleased at their cleverness. 'Now, will you tell us the name of the hottest State you lived in?'

'I visited several, equally hot; but Georgia was where I remained the longest, and where I collected my family of birds.'

'Georgia! That is very easy to remember, because it sounds like George.'

'Yes, and it was called so after a George—King George Second; because it was during his reign that English people first went over to live there.'

'Did no one live there before that?' asked Freddy.

'It was a wild country, inhabited only by savage Indians. Now it has many large and beautiful towns, with fine broad streets, and trees all down the middle of the streets.'

'And can carriages and horses go under the trees and between them?'

'Most of the streets are very wide, like two roads side by side, divided by a strip of lawn—with rows of trees on each side, and with seats under the trees; so that there are sometimes four rows of trees all along these very wide streets.'

'How pretty!' exclaimed Maggie.

'Beautiful!' returned Aunt Jenny. 'And in the very middle of the town you hear the mocking-birds singing in the trees.'

'Do they build their nests there?'

'In the quieter streets and gardens, no doubt, they do.'

But it was not in a town where I found mine. That was at my friend's country house, and where ——'

'You found the tiny wee ——?'

'You lost the thrush?'

'The pussy ate up auntie's birdie?' exclaimed all the children at once.

'Yes, yes, all! But how about the hands? If everybody speaks at once, how are your questions to be answered? Now I think I must make another bargain; which is, that those who speak without first holding up their hands, must not expect to have their questions answered till the story is ended.'

'That's a capital idea,' was Maggie's answer, she not caring to ask so many questions as the rest.

'Very well; then you must all remember it. And now you are going to hear how it was that I had such a number of birds. Mocking-birds, you know, as well as many other singing birds that are to be found only in the Southern States, are very much prized by the people who live farther north. So, when I was going to Georgia to spend the winter, my cousins said, "Jenny, be sure to bring us some cage-birds when you come back." "A mocking-bird above all things for me," one said; another wanted a red-bird, which has a remarkably sweet whistle; and a third wished for a pair of another kind. But mocking-birds were what were chiefly desired, my favourite cousin setting her heart on a pair of them; and you may be sure I promised to do all I could to procure them.'

‘The winter in Georgia is so ——’

Another tap at the door, and an announcement that Miss Bernard had made the tea and was waiting, here cut short the story for that day. But such a happy hour had the children spent, that another rainy afternoon was almost longed for; and when it did come, the lessons were again got through with speed and satisfaction, again was the great arm-chair in Aunt Jenny's room dragged out, and the party, with the exception of little Percy, settled in and about it, when the history was resumed exactly where it had been suddenly stopped.





CHAPTER XV.

IN THE SOUTH OF GEORGIA.

THE winter in the south of Georgia is so mild and pleasant,' continued Aunt Jenny,—‘so much more like an English May or October, with seldom any ice on the ground,—that even in December and January you may sometimes hear the sweet song of the mocking-bird. Then there are numbers of other birds of most beautiful plumage,—bright blues, scarlets, yellows,—all colours, to be seen in the woods, some of them perching on fences so close that I thought I should easily catch them. Some are found in Georgia all the year round; others from a colder country go there to spend the winter.’

‘Perhaps those robins from Maine which stole the lace?’

‘Very likely, Maggie, for I saw robins there; and you remember they are called migrating birds, because they travel from one part to another; and those migrating robins are fine songsters. In fact the woods in that part

of Georgia were alive and ringing with the songs of birds. You want to know if I caught any of them? No, not then. I was advised to wait for the young birds, which are more easily tamed than the old ones. Those reared by hand grow more reconciled to the cage, and become more familiar than the old birds. But the winter afforded an excellent opportunity for observations, many of the trees being bare then; while by February and March the leaves come out thick and fast, and there are fruits and flowers which in England no one expects to see before May and June.'

'Then do the birds build their nests any sooner?'

'Many of them begin to build quite early in the spring, others wait till the season is more advanced; because the birds and other creatures which are born in those hot countries, like, and even require, a greater degree of warmth than those born in colder climates. For instance, let us suppose some little birds which live in Iceland all the year round, assembling together on one of the warmest of their summer days; and when it is no hotter in Iceland than it is in the very middle of the winter in southern Georgia, the little birds, if they could speak, might say, "Oh, what sultry weather! Oh for a nice cool shower!" while in precisely the same sort of weather—about Christmas-time—in Georgia, the birds there might be saying, "Oh, what a chilly winter! Oh for the summer sunshine!" Do you understand me, Freddy?'

'You mean, Aunt Jenny, that there is a spring and a summer and an autumn and a winter for the birds in hot

countries, just the same as there is a spring and a summer and an autumn and a winter for the birds in England and Iceland, and that the little birds always wait for their warm weather to come before they make their nests, wherever they are?’

‘Yes, Freddy; seasons in every country, and birds and flowers and insects belonging to each season,—each living thing—even flowers, you know—being sensitive to heat or cold, comparatively, according to the climate in which it is raised. Another important thing is food; and the parent birds, gifted with that wonderful forethought called *instinct*, know that it would not be wise to bring forth their brood before certain fruits or berries or insects, upon which they feed their young, are ready.’

‘How can the little birds tell when the gooseberries and cherries will be ripe?’ asked Ellie, with her hand stretched out as far as ever she could reach.

‘God teaches them, darling. God has given them what is called instinct; and—Maggie may remember—we have already decided that instinct is, in some respects, superior to reason.’

‘I wonder how God does teach them?’ remarked Freddy. ‘You said once before that the old birds taught the young ones!’

‘Does God go down into the nests to teach them?’ said little Ellie very gravely.

‘It is not by language that they learn, Ellie, but by a knowledge which is born in them, and which was born in their parents before them,—a particular sort of knowledge,

which God gave to the very first birds that were ever created.'

'It often seems as if birds and animals have reasons for doing things,' said Freddy. 'I wish you would tell us whether they really do think, Aunt Jenny.'

'It is a question which puzzles older and wiser heads than yours, my little Freddy; and I do not think Ellie would very well understand the argument. Some day, when Duncan comes back, we can have a little more talk about reason and instinct. He will help us to argue the point; and Ellie looks as if she had heard almost enough for to-day.'

'I haven't heard a ghost story, though,' said Ellie, as if she were quite willing to stay for that.

'Oh yes, Aunt Jenny, do tell us a ghost story, like that one about your little white dog in the cradle,' cried Freddy.

'Auntie Jenny, I'm not a bit tired,' added Ellie.

'My darlings,' cried Aunt Jenny, smiling at their eagerness, 'I am sorry to disappoint you; but as for another ghost story—oh dear!'

'Can't you think of *one* more ghost story, Aunt Jenny? We did like that one about Flossy so much! Duncan said ——'

'Oh yes, Freddy!' interrupted Maggie; 'Duncan did say it was a "jolly good story;" but then, you know, he said in his letter that Aunt Jenny was to be sure and not tell any more ghost stories until he got back.'

'But can't you think of something else like the little dog ghost when Duncan does come?'

‘I am afraid I really can not, Freddy—not among my American pets, certainly.’

‘But besides the pets, Aunt Jenny—some strange thing that comes to frighten people in the night.’

‘Oh! A strange thing that comes to frighten a person in the night, as Flossy frightened the good old gentleman at Colonel Forrest’s? Well, if that’s the sort of ghost you mean, I do think I can remember a very strange thing, which frightened me terribly one night.’

‘Oh jolly, jolly! capital! Yes, we shall be sure to like *that!*’ exclaimed both Maggie and Freddy simultaneously.

‘And will you tell it us now?’ asked Ellie. ‘I am not the least bit tired of listening.’

‘But do you not think Dunny might like to hear it too?’ replied Miss Morton. ‘He will be here next week, you know. Just for to-day, though, as you so much enjoy hearing about frightened people, I will tell you of another little alarm I had. It is not a long or a very wonderful story; but it will show you again how people sometimes terrify themselves needlessly, when a little courage may set matters right in a moment.’

‘We shall be sure to like the story, dear Aunt Jenny,’ cried Maggie. ‘Please begin.’

‘It happened the very first night of my visit to Georgia, when all the family had gone to bed. My friend Mrs. Birnell had introduced me to my bedroom, and to a large closet in it; but she had not thought of mentioning the outside gallery or piazza, nor had I at first observed the

door, or I might have asked her where it led to. There was a famous fire of pine-wood logs, which threw out so much light as well as heat, that a candle was almost unnecessary. Two long and singular passages under a sloping ceiling on one side the room, seemed to lead to a window at each end, and nothing else. You must try to imagine the chamber—a very large one—with these two passages and the big closet on one side ; and opposite them the fireplace, wide enough to hide a negro or two in each of its capacious corners. High up in the wall were several square holes, through which came gusts of wind and the strangest noises—as if the negroes might be climbing up on the other side and peeping through. What those square holes under the ceiling were for, I could not make out ; and high up in the closet were more holes and more strange noises. The windows at the ends of the two long passages rattled with the wind, and the great wide doors rattled with the wind, and the wind in the chimney roared and whistled ; and altogether, what with being very tired with the long journey, and feeling strange and lonely in this great wild-looking chamber full of dark, queer corners and strange noises, Aunt Jenny got rather frightened and nervous.

‘Then I could not imagine the use of the immense wide door, like a street door with panes of glass all round it. It seemed to have no fastening of any kind ; and though it hung so loosely on its hinges that it rattled in the wind, I could not get it open. On peeping through the panes I could distinguish trees and sky, but where

the door could possibly lead puzzled me not a little. Bringing the candle to examine it more carefully, I discovered high up, almost above my reach, a wooden button, and on twisting this round, open flew the door, nearly knocking me down with its force—for it was a stormy night—and out went my candle! The flare of the pine-wood fire was sufficient to show me that the door opened on to the sort of balcony piazza which I described to you last winter; but whether it belonged to other rooms than mine, I could not then tell. With some difficulty I got the heavy door closed and fastened again, but the insecurity of the little wooden button made me feel even more frightened and nervous than before.

‘Sitting down by the fire, I presently heard what I fancied were footsteps and whisperings outside this door, and on looking round saw what I believed to be two eyes peering in through one of the lower panes of glass. Knowing the negroes’ tricks of peeping in at the windows, I was not so much frightened, as annoyed at their impudence, and looked angrily towards them, expecting the intruders would run off as soon as they found themselves discovered. But no: the two great eyes remained fixed upon mine, and the great mouth seemed grinning in impudent defiance. As the face, which I now fancied was a man’s face, seemed to stare more defiantly, I grew exceedingly alarmed; and was making for the chamber door—the one leading to the stairs, you understand—when it suddenly opened, and in strode the girl, a negress, who waited upon me, and who, like the rest of them, without knocking or warning,

would thus burst in when least expected. On this occasion I was, however, too glad to see her to think of reproving her for the liberty, and could only hurriedly demand, "Where does that door lead to? There are people outside." Judge of Aunt Jenny's astonishment when the girl, instead of replying, covered up her mouth with her hands and thrust her dingy fingers between her lips, in a vain endeavour to check the bursts of laughter which escaped her.'

'Oh, what a rude, impudent servant, Aunt Jenny!' exclaimed Maggie indignantly. 'What did you do?'

'Well, her laughing convinced me at once that there was no cause for fear; and I was too glad of this to be angry with her, and especially as she knew no better. The poor things always do burst into fits of laughter at anything a little out of the common way, and she thought I ought to know the house as well as she did.

"Well," said I, "when you have done laughing, I should like to know who is outside that door?"

'It was several moments before she could compose herself enough to answer.

"Laws, missus!" (Ellie, the other day you wished to know if the negroes spoke English; so I will repeat her own words as nearly as I can remember). "Laws, missus! 'tain't nobody. Ain't nobody as can get out dar ——"

'Auntie, what is "dar?" Did she mean *door*?'

"Dar," and sometimes "thar," they say for *there*. "No one can get out there," she meant to say. "Spec 'tis de pigeons," she added.

“Pigeons?” I inquired.

“Yees ’m. Pigeons roosts out dar, they do; and mebbe”—that means maybe, or perhaps—“mebbe the light scared ’em. Dey’s tame, dey is; an’ dey’ll come right into de room, an’ drink out o’ de pitcher, dey will!”

‘Oh, how jolly! What fun! Did they come?’

‘Yes; in a few days indeed they did come, and made rather too free.’

‘But who could it have been that you saw looking through the pane of glass, Aunt Jenny?’

‘Well, when the girl assured me no one could gain access to that piazza except through my room, and that some poor little innocent pigeons only had caused the strange noises, I got courage to step out upon it to reconnoitre, and there I found the persevering eyes which had so annoyed me. And what do you think they were?’

‘Oh, what? what? Was it really anybody?’

‘Why, upon a ledge at the side of the door—just about as high from the floor as you are, Maggie—some one had left a brown jug, just the form and size of a person’s head; and on the pane through which the round form of the jug could be seen, were two spots in the glass—two round spots like eyes, and precisely the proper distance apart to look like the eyes of the dark face which the jug seemed to be. A dim pattern, and the bright lights upon the jug, all helped to make the face complete—a white line coming just where the great mouth and teeth would have been, and the reflection of the light on the shining surface

seeming to give life and action to the features, and adding greatly to the effect. It seems improbable that one could have been so deceived, but you can scarcely imagine what a strange similarity the whole thing bore to a negro's face.'

'I can imagine it, Aunt Jenny,' cried Maggie; 'for I have seen marks in the glass just like eyes. There are some in the nursery window.'

'Yes; and I can fancy it quite easily,' added Freddy, Ellie not being behind him in her appreciation of the story. 'Had the jug a handle to it?'

'If it had, it was not next to the pane of glass. You must remember, too, that I saw this only in the glimmer of the firelight, and at some distance off. The room being so large, and I being tired and nervous, was easily alarmed.'

'And did you look through the great holes in the wall, auntie?' asked Ella.

'No; but the girl told me that they were to let the light from my room into a dark closet which extended all along on the other side. But it was her mistress's closet; and no one could get into it to do any mischief, for "missus had the keys." The holes high up in the wall of my closet were also to let in the light from the piazza, and, as I afterwards found, to let in the pigeons too; for they made a nest on the top shelf in the course of the spring, and took complete possession, and that was more than I bargained for.'

Various opinions regarding the delights of having tame pigeons in a bedroom ended the conversation for that

afternoon. Maggie thought tame pigeons very nice, but preferred their being out-of-doors; Freddy and Ellie thinking that to see them drink out of the water-jug, and feed their young on the top shelf of a closet, was worth any amount of trouble. The face in the jug, however, was pronounced by all three to be 'better than no ghost at all;' and they ran off to the schoolroom to set Miss Bernard guessing what Aunt Jenny had found in a great, round, brown jug out in Georgia.





CHAPTER XVI.

THE FAMILY BATH.

IT was the day but one before Duncan came home, and a very wet day indeed it happened to be. A half holiday too ; and Aunt Jenny was to have taken Maggie, Freddy, and Ellie over to Dollington, to buy lots of things preparatory to Dunny's arrival. Poor little Freddy had set his whole heart on this expedition ; for, among other things, his carpenter's tools were to have been repaired, in readiness to complete the various articles which Duncan's ingenuity had devised for the menagerie last summer. Then Dor was to have had a new cage ; though, as he was now converted into a mere cold, inanimate ball, next spring would do equally well for that. Some wire was required for the other cages. In fact the 'shopping' list was almost as long as it had been last winter, when they had all driven into Dollington to make their Christmas purchases.

But, somehow or other, wet days never did cause any regrets to Aunt Jenny. On the contrary, one would have

thought she liked them better than fine ones, so did they seem to be the very days she wished for.

‘What a capital opportunity this afternoon will be to turn out the bird-room!’ said she at luncheon. ‘You have been wishing to change the cages, and give them all a thorough good cleaning. If I come and help you, we can get everything straight before Dunny comes; and unless you give up your walk to-morrow for that purpose, he will find everything in disorder. Now we can mend Bully’s perch, and make a new one for Speckly, and fix Parry’s swing and the fastening of the big cage, and put a new hook on Dor’s house-door, which will do very well until he comes to life again; and ——’

‘But where can we get the wire, Aunt Jenny? We were going to buy some on purpose, you know.’

‘Yes, Freddy, but I think I happen to have some which will do capitally; and if not, I suspect Butler can supply us with some, which we can make answer the purpose. Had we gone to Dollington this afternoon, we must have left the cages for Dunny to mend, and he will be so pleased to find them all secure and sound. At all events, the perches can be repaired, and the cages thoroughly cleaned, and you can let out all the birds, and give them the large bath for a treat in the meantime. It will be great fun to see them all washing together.’

‘Oh yes, oh yes! so we will, so we will give the birds the big bath!’ cried Freddy, jumping and clapping his hands—when, a minute before, he had been nearly crying with disappointment. ‘And, Aunt Jenny, that reminds

me of something. The other day, when I watched Bully have his bath, I saw the water roll off him and roll off him, and it was ever such a long time before his feathers got wet; and it made me think of what you said about the waterproof coats. So, will you explain to us this afternoon why it is that a bird's feathers do not get wet, as our clothes do? I daresay Dunny knows it already, so he won't mind your telling it before he comes.'

In anticipation of so much business, Maggie and Ellie seemed to be equally consoled for the loss of their drive; and as Aunt Jenny acquiesced in their wish to adjourn forthwith to the bird-room and set to work,—luncheon being now over,—the children ran off in different directions to collect tools, twine, bird-seed, sticks, etc. etc.; and by the time Miss Morton had hunted up the promised materials, Freddy and Ellie had got the bath—a large, shallow dish devoted exclusively to this purpose—down on the floor in the middle of the room, and were opening the cage-doors as fast as their little fingers could set to work. In another minute or two, there were Canaries, Linny, Speckly, Parry, Goldy, Bully, Lovies—the whole feathered family flying and chirping about the room as full of delight as their young master and mistresses.

Ellie was for turning even the gold fish into the bath; but to this the rest objected, as the larger birds might injure them. The white mice were, however, set free; and even Dor, rolled up tight and insensible, was coaxed to arouse himself and enjoy the general liberty, only he

proved too fast asleep to avail himself of the privilege. Squirry seemed equally indisposed to exert himself.

With the exception of these two sleepers, animation and excitement soon prevailed throughout the apartment; each occupant of which was noisy or busy after her or its own fashion. Freddy and Ellie, while supposing themselves to be important assistants in the grand turn-out, were in reality not doing much besides watching and commenting on the birds at their bath; but they were amused and contented, and Miss Morton's object was therefore attained. Maggie, on the contrary, was a regular little working bee, and Aunt Jenny's 'right hand;' and, when not absolutely busy with her fingers, was busy with her eyes and her brains, watching ingenious 'Yankee contrivances,' as she called them.

Regarding the management of this bird-room, the rougher work was regularly assigned to Anne, the under-housemaid; but the owners of the pets were considered individually responsible for the comfort and safety of their live property, because, as was explained at the beginning of this book, not pleasure alone, but to induce observation and a love of nature, as well as to cultivate kindness, patience, gentleness, and reflection, were Mr. and Mrs. Morton's object in providing their children with these abundant means of recreation. For procuring everything essential to the safe keeping of the pets, a regular and sufficient sum was allowed; but beyond this, in order to check waste and extravagance, all costs were to be defrayed out of the children's pocket-money; also, to

encourage economy and ingenuity, any overplus remaining from this monthly allowance was divided between the elder children for their own private use. It was, in a great degree, the demands and the training of his dumb family, and the reflection resulting from the regulations just described, which had made Duncan so capital a carpenter and cage-mender; for, as has already been hinted, few boys were so clever in inventing and manufacturing wonderful contrivances for the menagerie, particularly a part of it which he called the *mouse's gymnasium*,—ladders to run up, hoops to jump through, and shelves to reach—when especial delicacies were deposited in otherwise inaccessible places, in order to bribe the tiny climbers to go through their performances.

Owing to Duncan's absence from home, a variety of hinges, and fastenings, and slides, and perches had of late got out of repair. 'But,' said Aunt Jenny, 'it is never worth while to send the cages to Dollington for such trifles, nor yet to engage a man to come on purpose to repair them, when, with a little trouble, we can fix* them ourselves.'

So with scissors, and pincers, and wire, and glue, and slips of wood, and an old table to chip and hammer upon,

* 'Fix' was one of those Yankee expressions which just once in a way escaped Miss Morton, and to Maggie a most wonderful word it was; for, as she said, 'to fix,' in Yankee language, did not mean merely to make things tight and secure, as it did in English, but it seemed to answer the purpose of all the other active verbs in the grammar-book; so that, if there were no other active verbs at all, she didn't believe the Americans would ever miss them.

Aunt Jenny and Maggie set to work, Anne scrubbing and polishing meanwhile ; and Freddy and Ellie, between 'helping Aunt Jenny,' posting themselves close to the bath-dish, to watch and pass comments on the bathers.

'Look, oh look, Freddy!' cried Ellie ; 'Dunny's canary is going in again ; and he is so wet already, his feathers almost stick together. If he does not mind what he is about, he won't be able to fly up to the window.'

'Ah! but you just wait till he has shaken himself,' returned Freddy knowingly. 'There! Now look at him. Only the soft, downy feathers and the tips of the big ones are a little wet. That is because they are waterproof, Aunt Jenny says.'

'And if they were not waterproof, would the birds have to wait till they are dry?' asked Ellie.

'I suppose they would have to wait,' returned Freddy thoughtfully, while Maggie and her aunt exchanged a look which seemed to say, 'Let us hear how Freddy will try to explain it.' 'But it would be ever such a long time, Ellie, before they got dry. And then, supposing the poor little birds were down upon the ground while it was raining fast, and the wet soaked quite through their feathers, how could they fly up into a tree if the cat came by? For don't you remember at Brighton, Ellie, when we bathed in the sea, our bathing-dresses stuck to us so close, that we could scarcely get back up the steps into the bathing-machine?'

'Oh yes, Freddy, I remember quite well. And the bathing-woman carried me up, because the wet flannel

was so heavy I couldn't lift my feet. The little birds never could get up into a tree, if their wings stuck as close as our bathing-dresses did ; could they ?'

'No. But then Aunt Jenny says that the coats of birds and animals never do get soaked through to the skin, as our clothes would be, if we stood out in the fields in the rain as they do. I think one reason is, because wool and hair are so greasy ; for don't you remember, Ellie, when we stroked that tame old sheep in Betty Rogers' garden, how very greasy and unpleasant our hands were, and Martha took us in to wash them directly ?'

'Oh yes, Freddy, I remember it. It was not at all a nice old sheep. And don't you remember, too, when we scratched Daisy's ears while Susan was milking her, our hands felt all ——'

'Just as they feel when we rub Taffy. It must be because the coats are greasy that the wet does not soak in ; for you know, Ellie, wet never does stop on greasy things.' Having arrived at this conclusion, the young reasoner turned to appeal to his aunt, and smiled in answer to her smile, as he found her listening and prepared to answer him. 'Aunt Jenny, I think I have found out the reason that sheep and cows and such things don't get wet through in the rain. Is it not because their coats are so greasy ?'

'You have partly discovered the cause, my little Freddy ; and I have been quite pleased to hear you making use of your reason in trying to account for things, and helping Ellie to understand too. And I was

only waiting until Maggie had rounded off this new perch for Bully — (has she not made a famous one?)—before having a little chat about the waterproof coats. As a general rule, you may attribute to the greasiness of the coat the fact that an animal is not rendered ill and uncomfortable by a shower of rain. Not but what a long-continued soaking would injure most creatures. In the coat of some animals there is a greater degree of this greasy quality than in others: for example, the sheep, which can take a deal of wetting unharmed.'

'But birds, Aunt Jenny!' interrupted Maggie. 'My dear little canaries and my lovies feel soft and clean, and not in the least greasy, when I hold them in my hand.'

'And it is a curious thing, Maggie, that birds, more than any other creatures, have a natural oiliness in their covering. Besides the natural texture of feathers to ward off wet, birds are in fact especially provided with toilet pomatum, but apply it so skilfully and delicately, that their feathers, like baby's curls, feel only soft and clean, and not unpleasantly greasy. As Freddy just now remarked, if the water could soak into the soft, feathery coat of a bird as easily as it soaks through a flannel bathing-dress, every shower of rain would cause the death of thousands of birds; for they would be quite disabled from using their wings to raise themselves into the air, and must remain on the ground helpless and exposed to the attacks of their numerous enemies. But in order to preserve the lightness and elasticity of their feathers, birds

are abundantly supplied with an oil, which just now, for the sake of assisting your memory, I called their toilet pomatum. During life this oil is constantly renewed, so that the bird has always enough for use, and is able to dress its feathers with it, and keep them in that peculiar condition, that the wet rolls off immediately.'

'But, Aunt Jenny!' cried Freddy, 'where do they get their pomatum? And where do they keep it? I have never seen our little birdies oiling themselves.'

'Bully and the canaries are now making their toilet after their bath; Goldy and Speckly have not yet finished theirs; Linny also is combing and dressing himself. Watch them all a little, and say if you observe anything remarkable in their mode of proceeding.'

The whole party watched the birds in silence for a minute or two; then said Freddy, 'Bully has got a flea or something which teases him, for he keeps leaving off doing his breast to bite himself on the back—on the top of his tail, I mean.'

The idea of a flea biting poor Bully amused Ellie immensely, and soon her quick eyes discovered one or two of the other birds twisting round their heads and necks to peck at themselves in the same manner; so she gave it as her opinion that Speckly and Nary had also a flea. Whereupon Maggie indignantly exclaimed, 'Freddy! what nonsense! As if my dear little Bully had fleas! Ellie, birds don't have fleas ever. At least some great big ugly birds may have, perhaps; but I am sure *our* pets have not.'

Maggie then watched her pets a little more ; so did the rest—Aunt Jenny smiling knowingly all the while.

‘But seriously, Aunt Jenny, though,’ Maggie continued, ‘it *is* funny of Bully to keep on like that. Look at him. There! Just down on his back. Something *must* tease him, for he keeps on leaving off doing the rest of his feathers, to bite himself there.’

‘And so they all do every now and then,’ cried Freddy. ‘That’s what made me say Bully had a flea.’

‘I have often seen the canaries do that,’ said Maggie ; ‘but never thought much about it, except to wonder sometimes why they did not finish cleaning one bit at a time. I am sure, though—quite, *quite* sure my dear little birdies have not got a single flea on them ; have they, Aunt Jenny?’

‘It is not very likely, Maggie dear. But you are all of you right in supposing there is some cause for the birds to peck at themselves in the manner you have observed. And when I noticed any of my pets doing the same thing, I used to think as you do ;—that either something teased the bird, and obliged it to turn its beak so frequently to that part of its back, or else that it was a singular caprice in it not to finish off one part of its dress before going to another.’

‘And now, have you found out *why* they do that?’ Maggie inquired.

‘Yes ; since I read more about birds, I have learned the reason ; and it is because just at that part of the bird’s back the skin is more oily than at any other part, and the bird greases its bill there to dress its feathers. Indeed it

is just about there, where the tips of the wings meet, that birds have their little supply of toilet pomatum, or, more correctly speaking, feather-oil. It is secreted in two little tiny cells or sacs, called glands, which lie close under the skin, and which, on being pressed or pinched by the bill, the oil is squeezed out as the bird requires it.'

'Oh, how very curious!' cried Maggie; the two younger children finding no words to express their wonderment. 'What a very curious little bag a bird's pomatum-box must be! I should think it must be something like those little scent-fountains which you squeeze, you know, Freddy, and out comes the scent. Don't you remember that pretty little sort of case which Aunt Marianne once gave me, and which Dunny *would* call a squirt; and he squeezed nearly every bit of the scent away directly?'

'Oh yes!' Freddy remembered the little case very well indeed, it being imprinted on his memory from that very fact of Dunny's energetic experiments—he, Freddy, having in consequence been deprived of the gratification of squeezing it at all, but being afterwards rewarded by the gift of the empty fountain; which, on examination, was found to be lined with tinfoil. Freddy, however, was not disposed to think that a little bird's pomatum-case could be lined with tinfoil. 'Is it, Aunt Jenny?'

'Well, the feather-oil sac is not exactly like an ornamented scent-case, certainly,' replied his aunt, amused at the comparison, 'because a gland is of a more solid or spongy nature, and not hollow. But if you can imagine your little scent-tube to be filled with an oily sponge, and

enclosed in a thin skin instead of a pretty case lined with tinfoil, that might convey a more correct idea of the sort of cell in which a bird's feather-oil is secreted. But you must remember that it is, after all, a very wee, wee pomatum-case; though, by being never empty, your little birdies can always find enough to grease their bills. In swans, sea-gulls, and other water-birds, there is a more abundant supply of this oil, as their feathers require to be more frequently dressed with it. If you watch the ducks, you will see that, the very moment they come to the top after diving, their feathers are as dry and as smooth as if they had not been near the water.'

Both Maggie and Freddy had often noticed that, they said; and also the swans down by the paper-mill; and how beautifully dry and smooth their necks always were the very moment they lifted them out of the water.

'In a swan,' continued Miss Morton, 'the pair of oil-glands are very large indeed—more than an inch long; but in some small land-birds, perhaps, they could be distinguished only with a microscope, and then only by those very wise people who study and examine these sort of things, and write books about them for our benefit. Another curious thing is, that when a bird is dead, its feathers lose all this oiliness and get soaked directly.'

'Yes,' said Freddy, 'we saw a poor little dead sparrow lying out in the rain one day, and his feathers were all soppy and messy.'

And then the little party compared notes, and recalled various occasions on which they had seen dead birds—

game very frequently—whose feathers were matted and dull; and then they wondered afresh at the astonishing wisdom and goodness of that Almighty Being who had displayed such marvellous skill in the creation of all things, and in enabling His creatures to take every necessary care of themselves.

‘Besides the nature of feathers—that smooth, oily, and delicate surface, and the beautiful direction in which they lie one over the other—there is in parrots and some other birds a sort of fine powder covering the skin, and which answers a similar purpose to the oil, or which, with the oiliness, is an additional safeguard against wet.’

Martha now returned with a tray full of tins, water fountains, jars of bird-seed, etc. etc., and the party proceeded to finish up the afternoon's business, contemplating the nicely-renovated and well-arranged cages with general satisfaction; Freddy even going so far as to say that, for his part, he was now glad they had not gone to Dollington, particularly as Aunt Jenny promised they should all go the very first fine day after Dunny came home, and they should have a holiday on purpose.

After this, whenever the children saw the birds dressing their feathers, they tried hard to discover the oil which they applied with their bills; but failing to discern the least particle of it, decided that it must be a very tiny bag of oil indeed, that gland of which their aunt had told them; but they did not the less wonder at that astonishing beauty and form of feathers which should cause the rain to roll off so easily.



CHAPTER XVII.

A GREAT MANY RED-BIRDS.

TWO days after this, Maggie and Freddy had the supreme satisfaction of accompanying their aunt in the carriage which fetched Duncan from the station; and so much did they find to tell him, and to show him, and to do with him, from the very first five minutes of his arrival at home, that Miss Morton held a secret conference with Miss Bernard on the expediency of proclaiming a general holiday for the remainder of the week. This seemed the more reasonable, because, on account of Mr. and Mrs. Morton's absence from home this year, the usual Christmas holidays were to be suspended, Miss Bernard having willingly postponed her visit to her friends in order to share Miss Morton's charge of the family; but, as a compensation to the young people, Miss Bernard had agreed to give Maggie and Freddy an additional half-holiday each week of Duncan's vacation, and a whole holiday whenever their aunt might have what Dunny called one of her 'jolly schemings' in view; which jolly schemes for her nephews' and nieces'

enjoyment were by no means unfrequent, as my young readers may well imagine.

So, what with the Christmas and New Year's-day doings, what with skating on frosty days, in-door sports on rainy ones, and story-telling when no better amusement presented itself, there was no lack of fun and merriment at Mortonfield this winter any more than last.

Duncan made Maggie tell him as much as she could recollect of the few stories he had missed hearing. 'Good enough for Freddy and Ellie, but awfully slow,' he pronounced them. What he wanted Aunt Jenny to tell him, was 'about such birds as we don't find in England, and what the difference is between the English and American kinds of such as we do have in England—such as thrushes and sparrows and robins; because Aunt Jenny said the birds they call sparrows and robins over there are not like our sparrows and robins. So how in the world is a fellow to know the proper name of a bird when he does catch one! For you know, Mag, I mean to make a regular study of birds some day, and to be a collector myself as soon as I am old enough to travel.' Maggie thought all this extremely delightful; and when the time came for the next 'talk about birds,' she and Freddy got out the big chair, and summoned Aunt Jenny, with all the more lively anticipations of pleasure because Dunny made one of the party.

'Now, please, Aunt Jenny, I vote you go on from where you left off last winter. You left that young thrasher out on a log in the woods; and then there was

a sparrow which you promised to tell us about. Such a jolly, pretty one, you said it was.'

'A "sweet little bird" was what I think I said it was, Dunny, the adjective applying as much to its manners as to its dress. But "pretty" all little birds are, even if clad only in russet brown, like the Virginia sparrows. Are they not?'

'Ay! What did it do then?'

'It and a dozen other little sparrows, all equally gentle and confiding, would come hopping about the doors and windows, in the most winning and familiar manner possible, much as your little pensioners come to the dining-room window every morning, only in a far more modest and peaceable flock. That sparrow was properly one of the bunting family—the chipping bunting—so called, probably, from the almost incessant chirping song it utters, not much louder than a cricket,—a sort of sharp twitter, something like the sound produced by striking two pebble-stones smartly and rapidly together.'

'And was that all the song?'

'Yes, that was all; and the little birds seemed resolved to make up in quantity what was deficient in quality, for they twittered all day long. It was a lively and cheerful twitter, if not a musical one.'

'Then, if your sparrow was only a little brown bird which could not sing, what made you keep it, Aunt Jenny?' persisted Duncan.

'It was a young bird which came under the piazza where we were sitting, so one of the black aunties caught

it for me to look at ; then, finding it so gentle and pretty (for it really was beautifully marked—rich brown shaded, and spotted with black on the back, a black frontlet, a white breast, and white over the eyes and on the wings, and grey towards the tail), and so tame and contented, I kept it for some days ; then, requiring the cage for the young red-birds, I left the door open for the little sparrow to go out and in as it liked, or to go away altogether, which it very soon did. No doubt it saw and heard its little brothers and sisters in the garden, and flew away to join them.'

'And now tell us about the red-birds, Aunt Jenny,' urged Duncan.

'Yes ; I do so want to hear about those three darling little red-birds,' echoed Maggie. 'Those were the ones that your cousins so much wished you to bring them, were they not?'

'Being brought to me as "red-birds," I of course supposed them to be the kind so much in request ; but they turned out to be another species. The birds were all new to me ; and as the people of those parts had not paid much attention to the feathered inhabitants of the woods, it is not surprising that among a great many which were commonly called "red-birds" we should confuse the varieties.

'There is one from far south called the *summer red-bird*, to distinguish it from others which come from the north to spend the winter ; and there is one called the *crimson finch* ; and one with a fine crest called the *scarlet*

cardinal—not unfrequently brought to England, and known here as the *Virginia nightingale*.'

'Oh we've seen it—we've seen that sort of red-bird! At Brighton, Dunny, don't you remember mamma once took us with her to call on a lady who had lots of birds, and there were two rather large ones—red, with a tall, pointed crest—and she called them the *Virginia nightingales*? I particularly remember the name, Aunt Jenny, because papa used to have your letters from Virginia, and I wondered if those birds had come from there; and Dunny said he didn't believe they did. Do they, Aunt Jenny?'

Maggie was quite in ecstasies when her aunt told her that the cardinal birds were common not only in Virginia, but in many other parts of America,—the warmer parts,—and that she had carried a pair of them all the way from the south of Georgia to Philadelphia, for the young ladies who despised the poor little thrashers. 'Yes,' resumed Miss Morton, 'and so you have seen the "red-birds" that I had been commissioned to procure,—the handsome and popular *scarlet cardinal*, which is such a universal favourite, partly because he is such a fine fellow and easily provided for, but chiefly on account of his sweet, rich note, which is as clear as the whistle of a flageolet.'

'Yes,' said Duncan; 'that lady at Brighton told us how beautifully her red-birds whistled—only, we did not hear them. She said they came from Charleston; and that is not in Virginia? But, Maggie, if you remember, only one was so very bright; the other was a sort of

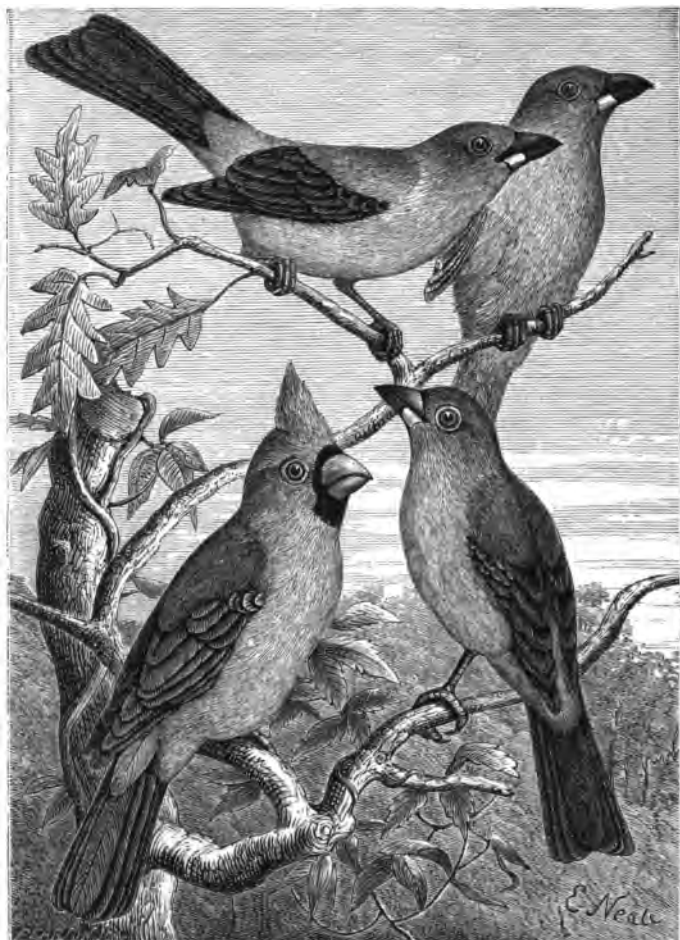
dingy pink, and yellowish on the head and breast ; and they both had crests and very thick bills.'

'The female bird is of a much paler colour—more a buff than a scarlet, with pale crimson wings and tail, and darker on the back. The proper name of this species of bird is the *grosbeak*—perhaps so called from the thick bill which you observed, and which is a characteristic of all the grosbeaks ; for there are several species, all having the same form of bill, and all being conspicuous for their brilliant plumage, particularly the male birds. The grosbeaks are related to the finches—a very large family, which have all rather short and thick bills, though not so remarkably so as the grosbeaks.'

'And were those other red-birds all grosbeaks?' asked Duncan.

'No ; but finches most of them were. There was one called the purple finch, but wearing a general crimson hue ; another, a *red bunting*, was gay as a parrot, with scarlet and gold and blue. Those known as the *summer red-birds* came from Mexico, where they had been spending the winter. The male was entirely red, exceedingly bright, but the female was yellow. Besides these gay members of the finch family, numerous woodpeckers, all pretty nearly of the same size, and all clad in a garb of equal brilliancy, puzzled as much as they dazzled me.'

Little Ellie here broke in with an opinion, that so many red-birds must make the trees look like a hedge of poppies. Maggie's imagination was not quite so vivid as this, but she pictured to herself a scene of great beauty



SCARLET TANAGERS AND GROSBREAK.

in the rich and varied greens of the thick trees, with the gem-like birds flitting in and out and around them, and the ground beneath enamelled with flowers, like a rich carpet,—pictures which made the two boys look forward with all the more impatience to that period when, being ‘grown-up,’ they would begin their travels, and make that vast collection of beautiful things, from the red-birds and humming-birds of America, to the sugar-birds and sun-birds of Australia and Africa.

‘But, now, Aunt Jenny,’ said Freddy; ‘now you have not told us anything about your own little red-birds that you put into the sparrow’s cage!’

‘No; we have left them till quite the last, poor little things. The gardener found the nest, and brought it to me with three young birds in it; and when I asked him how to feed them, he told me to stand the cage near an open window, and let the young birds take their chance, for the old ones would be sure to find them out and come and feed them.’

‘And did they?’ ‘Did you?’ ‘Did they?’ exclaimed the eager audience.

‘Yes; and opposite the window where the cage stood were some tall old trees; and after the poor little miserable nestlings had struggled and sprawled and squeaked themselves out of their nest several times, in a most heart-rending manner—for they were only a few days old—I saw an extremely bright red-bird flying to and fro, then settling on the tree, and again dashing past the window in a restless and disturbed manner. It settled one moment, and

was off again, now and then approaching the window, as if to make an inspection, but uncertain what next to do. I moved away out of sight, and, keeping very still, continued to watch. Soon another bird, a yellow one, accompanied the red one; and as they both behaved in a similar manner, uttering peculiar cries, and approaching quite near to the window, I conjectured that this second one must be the mother.'

'How very strange for the papa bird to be red, and the hen yellow!' said Maggie.

'Yes, so I thought; but afterwards found that in many of the finches the scarlets and crimsons are worn by the male bird only, the yellows and quieter tints adorning and protecting the mother.'

"Protecting!" Aunt Jenny?' exclaimed Duncan inquiringly.

'Yes, Dunny. Doubtless it is a great protection for the mother, who has to spend so much of her time on the nest, to be clad in the less conspicuous colours. In this species, the male is of the brightest scarlet, with jet black wings and tail—a most brilliant fellow; and the female is of a dark, dusky, greenish colour on the back, and yellow beneath,—colours that would be scarcely distinguishable on the nest.'

'Oh, ah! I did not think of that,' said Duncan. 'To be sure, the yellows and dingy colours would not show among the leaves half as plainly as reds.'

'I have often wondered why the male birds should always be decked out in the prettiest colours,' said

Maggie. 'Now I shall know that God made the mother birds less pretty, so that they might be safer.'

'And what did the birds do then?' was Freddy's hint that the story should proceed.

'They had evidently discovered their little ones; but, as if uncertain how far to venture, continued to fly restlessly to and fro for a considerable time. At last, great was my delight to see the red one come and perch upon the window-sill with something in his mouth; then, finding all quiet within, he ventured on to the cage, and after eyeing the young ones between the wires, and talking to them (as well as he was able, with food in his beak), hopped round to the entrance, and went in to feed them.'

'Oh the poor little starved darlings! How glad they must have been to see their papa!' cried Maggie.

'It was a jolly good dodge of the gardener's to get them fed,' observed Duncan.

'Did the scarlet-and-black bird come any more?' asked Freddy.

'Having thus once found its way, the red-bird came again and again, and next the mother ventured in, one or the other keeping constantly on the watch in the tree, or going away only to procure food. After a time, I could tell by the sound of the young ones' voices (whether I was looking or not) when the parents were near, and when they came to the cage.'

'What did they feed them upon?' Duncan wished to know.

'They seemed to bring all sorts of things—insects, as well as fruit or berries, or seeds.'

'And did *you* not feed them at all?'

'No, I did not attempt it; for the parent birds having satisfied themselves that the new home, so strange and treeless, was not dangerous, came frequently, the female even stopping on the nest occasionally.'

'Why did you not put the nest in that big bough which you stuck up in the corner of the piazza for the little thrashers to perch on?' suggested Duncan.

'We made so much use of the piazza, the old birds would never have ventured there. But in the quiet corner, just in front of the tall old trees, the parents soon grew confident. I did cover the cage with green sprays and leaves, to make it appear more natural.'

The children all agreed that this was one of the most charming and easy ways of rearing young birds that they had ever heard of; and Duncan and Freddy resolved that they would make a similar attempt the very first time they found a nest worth taking. 'Only, the worst of it is,' said Duncan, 'there are so few English birds that we want for a cage. I don't believe thrushes would come in at the bird-room window to feed their young ones; and finches are so hard to find. Were those red-birds of yours finches, Aunt Jenny?'

'Yes; but their proper name was *tanager*—the scarlet tanager. They are related to the little sparrow, and called, also from the male bird, the scarlet sparrow; and another name for him is the *black-winged summer red-bird*,

because, like the other summer red-bird, he comes from the still hotter countries southward, to spend the summer in the States ; while some of the other red finches find the States quite warm enough to suit them for a winter residence, and go to Canada and New Brunswick to spend the summer.'

'I've thought of a riddle!' shouted Duncan. 'Why are papa and mamma like the summer red-birds?'

'We will leave Freddy to guess that,' said Miss Morton, smiling. Freddy did not take long to think, and answered: 'Because they have gone to a warm place for the winter.'

'Migrated to the south!' exclaimed Maggie, much pleased at 'Dunny's cleverness.' 'Aunt Jenny, won't that be capital to ask papa and mamma the next time we write?'

'Why is Uncle Edwin like those American robins?' cried Freddy, after reflecting a moment.

'Why, because he goes fishing to Norway every summer, to be sure,' answered Duncan ; upon which the rest all laughed, and declared that the American robins did *not* 'go fishing' in Norway.

'But we know what Dunny means,' said Maggie. 'He means, because the American robins go to the north when the hot weather comes, just as Uncle Edwin does.'

Then the little party thought of so many of their acquaintances out of whom they could make riddles because they were 'birds of passage,' like the finches and thrushes—going northwards in summer and southwards in winter—that tea was announced before the fate of the little red-birds became known.



CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TINY YELLOW-BIRD.

NOW long the tanagers continued to feed their little ones, the young people were very anxious to learn, and soon reassembled for that purpose.

‘They came regularly for many days,’ resumed Miss Morton, ‘and the nestlings were flourishing famously. At dawn of day—for the window was always open—the loving greeting of the mother bird and the happy twitter of the little ones would awake me, and on peeping round I would see them. At that early hour, when all around was so still and peaceful, the handsome scarlet tanager would sit quietly pluming himself, and displaying his jet black wings and tail on the top of the cage, while the mother fed and twittered to her young ones within, the whole family seeming as happy and contented as if in their native tree.’

Duncan wished to know ‘whether the young birds were red or yellow?’

‘Neither the one nor the other, but nondescript little

things, and all too much alike to tell what they would turn out to be; for the tanagers do not attain their full colour until they are nearly a year old. Indeed the male bird does not put on his full scarlet-and-black suit until he comes north the following spring; till when he wears a dress like his mother and sisters. My young trio were growing quite pretty, and were nearly fledged, when ——'

'What? Oh what?' cried Maggie, clasping her hands in alarm; for she saw hesitation and regret in her aunt's face.

'You don't mean to tell us that they got out of the window into the clutches of that mischievous old cat?' said Duncan, quite vexed.

'No, I don't mean quite that,' replied Miss Morton; 'but you must prepare yourselves to hear of a sad calamity. One morning I was awoke by a fluttering and scuffling quite different from the usual soft, quiet greeting between the parents and their offspring. It startled me into sudden waking, with a sense of danger; and springing up, I beheld the cat—that same watchful, stealthy, merciless cat—escaping through the window with a little bird in her mouth. When I looked into the cage, behold it was empty! Can you believe that Aunt Jenny was so foolish as to sit down by it on the floor, and wring her hands and cry? But while thus sitting, something moved down in the corner under the curtain, and there, to my joy, was one of the birdies. It had scrambled out of the cage; but the third was gone altogether; and the distracted parents were flying to and fro before the win-

dow, and uttering cries of distress in a truly piteous state. How the cat got in at that window was a complete puzzle, it being inaccessible from the ground. Whether she took a long leap from the tree, or whether she got out of some other window, and then crept along a narrow ledge to mine, none of us could determine. But come she did, having probably been many days watching the parent birds, and finding her way to the young ones. I had thought them so safe, for the cat was never known to be up-stairs; and indeed did not belong to the house at all, but to the cook, who lived in a cabin across the yard.'

'There were nothing but misfortunes, Aunt Jenny,' said Maggie. 'It seemed as if you never were to have any birds; didn't it?'

'Many misfortunes, truly, dear Maggie, attended my poor little pets; and I did almost despair of ever getting any safely to the north. Perhaps, though, if we only knew it, not one quarter of the birds that are caught to be reared ever do live to grace the cages for which they were intended, but come to an untimely end. Also, in order that we may become acquainted with the habits of dumb creatures, thousands must be sacrificed every year! It seems cruel, and a pity that it should be so; yet the inquiries of the naturalist must be satisfied, otherwise how could books on natural history ever be written? Unnecessary cruelty should be carefully avoided; and when we do capture a young bird or two for a cage, the parents will not grieve long over their loss, or miss them so keenly,

if we leave at least a couple in their nest to occupy their attention.'

'What became of the little bird that the cat did *not* eat?' asked Freddy.

'It was some time before the parents recovered from their alarm and regained their confidence; especially as the cage was moved to safer quarters, and hung high up in the piazza, where the parents could not see it from their accustomed tree. But, as I hoped and expected, they were at length drawn by the cries of the nestling, and found their way round to the other tree, and thence to the cage. Poor things, how glad they seemed! and how glad was I! and how much they found to say, and to do, and to set to rights after such a terrible day of alarms! I believe they stopped in the tree close by all that night; but I thought it best to fasten the cage door, as the young bird was getting strong enough to scramble out of the nest, and might have fallen out of the cage; and in the morning I opened the door, setting the cage on the ground, and letting the birdling take its chance. After witnessing such affection on the part of the parents, nothing would have induced me to deprive them of their only remaining child, and I resolved to let it have entire liberty whenever they were near, so that they might entice it away when it was old enough; for, as I think I told you, it was then nearly fledged.'

'How very kind of you, Aunt Jenny, to let the little birdie go when you wanted it so much!'

'No, Maggie. There was not much merit in giving it

its liberty ; for the tanagers are not good song-birds, and I found the red grosbeaks and the thrush and the mocking-bird quite enough to take care of—particularly to carry on a long journey.'

'Oh, you *had* some other red-birds?' said Duncan. 'And was that thrush the one that you left out on the log?'

'Yes—to both questions. The scarlet cardinals that travelled with me to Philadelphia had been brought me a few days previously ; and beauties they were—both males, and both, as I have since heard, are alive and well, and in full dress. As you and Maggie have seen this kind of "red-bird," and already know something about it, you will not care to hear any further account of those two. They were not hard to rear, and fortunately escaped accident. As for that loving little thrasher which was the hero of our last winter's stories, you remember how I tried to teach it to take care of itself, and left it one morning, hopping among the ants' eggs, on a great log—the trunk of a fallen tree, in fact.'

'Oh yes ; we remember that perfectly well !' exclaimed Maggie. 'And did you get behind a bush to watch it?'

'No ; but that afternoon, as soon as the sun was low enough to afford shade, away trudged I to the log once more—never for a moment expecting to see my dear little Rufus again, but feeling too anxious about him not to make the attempt, and half hoping he might come on hearing my voice. It was a good long walk, for I had chosen a very secluded part ; and as I approached the

place I called aloud, and talked in my usual bird language, looking and listening on every side for my nursling, and resolving that, if he should come to me, I would take him home for the night, and give him his liberty again on the following morning. Not one answering chirp did I hear until I had nearly reached the log, when I thought I recognised in a feeble note the voice of my poor little Rufus. The next step or two brought me within sight of the tree, when, behold! there, all forlorn, was my nursling, standing on the very spot where I had placed him. Throughout that livelong day I do not believe he had moved one single yard, but had stood there, grieving, helpless, and terrified,—calling in vain for his foster-mother! Never shall I forget the joy of that young thrasher on seeing me again. How he fluttered his wings, and ran—half hopping, half flying—to the very end of the log to meet me, and there stood, quivering and beseeching to be taken, just as baby, when tired of walking, cries for nursie to carry her. Poor dear, little hungry Rufus! You may be sure I caught him up, and petted and fed him, and carried him home—never again to banish him to the solitude of the dreary woods.'

'I should have thought the woods would have been just the jolly place it liked,' observed Duncan.

'Had it been reared in them, so they would. But when we bring a young bird from its native bush, and compel it to live according to our ideas of enjoyment and convenience, we totally unfit it for its natural haunts. Now the little tanager, though partly reared in a cage,

had its own parents to teach it, and would be better able to take care of itself.'

'Then the little red-bird did go away with the old ones?'

'Yes, Freddy. One morning after I opened the cage door, it saw its mother in the tree, and flew straight across, without ever saying "good-bye" to me! The two were soon joined by the scarlet sparrow; and happy enough they all appeared, I assure you. They enjoyed the full range of the tree for a time, and the parents brought a breakfast; after which they led their child on a longer trip away to a neighbouring tree, and so out of sight. And that was the last I saw of my scarlet tanagers.'

'But you had ever so many birds left?'

'Yes, Ellie. Two scarlet cardinals, thriving wonderfully on fruit seeds, sop,—almost anything,—and soon able to feed themselves. Being brothers, and not so young when brought to me, they taught and helped each other, I daresay. Then there was my own dear little Rufus, who remained the pet and the baby of the bird family; and, on account of its amiable disposition, was accepted and made welcome by one of my northern friends, although "only a thrasher." Besides him, there was his cousin the mocking-bird, a noble fellow when once over his infant troubles; but his early life and education you already know from the history of the Virginia mocking-birds—a mere repetition of his own character and training; the care and vigilance bestowed upon him being perhaps the secret of my success with them the following year.'

'But, Aunt Jenny, I am sure you said the names of some other birds, too!' said Freddy, who never seemed tired of listening.

'Ay! A little yellow fellow,' said Duncan.

'Oh yes. The tiny, wee birdie that was so sweetly pretty,' cried Maggie.

'Ah, my little yellow pet! Yes; his is a short and a sorrowful history! He was the most difficult of all ages to manage,—too old, and at the same time too young.'

'Why, how could that be, Aunt Jenny?' cried Maggie.

'Because he had nearly, but not quite, learned to feed himself. Perhaps I did not give him the kind of food he liked; for he would neither pick it up himself, nor open his mouth for me to put it in. He made some attempts to feed himself, but seemed not to recognise the food I offered him.'

'Could not that gardener tell you what to feed him on?' Duncan wished to know.

'No. He did not know what bird it was, though he called it a sparrow. But there are no yellow sparrows in America. There are yellow-birds called warblers,—one, the yellow-pole warbler, a very small bird, closely resembling mine; another, the hemlock warbler, was also like it; but both were much larger than it seemed possible my tiny pet could ever become. In colour it was exactly like a canary, in form more like a wren; but neither are there any yellow wrens in America. In fact I have never been able to discover what it was, having described it to many bird naturalists; and, when I was in London, hunted

through all the best works on birds, but could find none of them small enough. It had some few black feathers about it, a pink beak, and large, soft, beautiful black eyes. From the tip of its beak to the end of its tail it did not measure above three inches; and the young cardinals and the thrushes looked like some immense, ungainly animals by its side. *Their* beaks I could open easily with my finger and thumb while holding them in my hand, but the mite of a yellow-bird could not be thus managed; and even by means of a pointed quill it was almost impossible to open his ~~wee, tender~~ beak, and get anything into his mouth.'

'Then did he not eat at all?' Maggie asked.

'Once now and then he seemed to take up something; for I placed all manner of things inside the cage to tempt him: and he would then open his tiny beak, in evident unsatisfied hunger. Very rarely was I skilful enough to present the quill (which was his feeding-spoon) in time, and was therefore compelled to open his little mouth by force. Some birds feed on small insects only; others on seeds, fruit, and so on. If the wee yellow-bird's mother had been giving it only tiny flies, it would not know the look of berries; if, on the contrary, she had brought it certain seeds, it would not know the use of sop. Imagine, therefore, what his terror must have been in a new and strange place, with a monstrous giantess standing over him to force food down his throat, as repugnant to his tastes as worms and grubs would be to your canaries!'

'Were you the giantess?' asked Ellie.

'Yes; to that morsel of life I must have appeared a

very terrific creature indeed. Its little pink feet were so tender and delicate, that my finger looked enormous as it sat upon it,—almost like a log of wood impossible to grasp.'

The children did not see how Aunt Jenny's slender finger could possibly look like a log; but she explained that the bird was so small, that its feet stood flat upon her finger, instead of clasping it as birds' claws usually clasp a perch.

'He was so exceedingly tiny, that everything seemed large and coarse by comparison. His beak was so diminutive, that one could find nothing small enough to put into it; and when, now and then for just one moment, he opened it, as if entreating food, it made my heart ache not to have the right kind at hand.'

'How long did you keep him?'

'He lived nearly a week,—now and then seeming to thrive, and making me hope to save him; but I fear I hurt his soft bill in trying to open it, for he suddenly ceased any attempts to feed himself, and then soon drooped. Of all my pets, not even Rufus excepted, I loved none so much as that beautiful, little, soft-eyed yellow-bird.'

'What a pity that you could not have it stuffed!' said Duncan.

'Yes; I much wished it. But we were too far from a town where such things could be done; and the heat of the weather compelled the immediate burial of the dead birdies; so only in my memory can they live.'

'And in our memories now, Aunt Jenny!' responded

Maggie; 'for I am sure we shall never forget what you have told us about your American pets; shall we, Dunny?'

'No.' Dunny and the rest declared they should love birds better than ever, from what Aunt Jenny had told about them.

'But did you not say you had a jay, Aunt Jenny?' said Freddy.

'Only for a day or two. It was the Florida jay—peculiar to that part of America, and an exceedingly pretty bird, but too noisy and too hungry to keep as a pet. Such an enormous appetite had that jay, it was next to impossible to satisfy it. It was too large as well.'

'What did it eat?'

'Few things come amiss to the jay family. When wild, they are terrible thieves—robbing gardens and orchards of fruit, and nests of eggs. Then such a squeaking and cawing and chattering as they keep up—bursting out afresh now and then, as if all the birds in the parish had met together to see who could scream the loudest. Jays are not favourites; even their beautiful blue dress does not win them friends; but I was glad of the opportunity to see the Florida jay, a rather rare species.'

'I thought you were staying in Georgia, Aunt Jenny, not Florida.'

'So I was, Dunny; but quite the southern part of the State, you remember. Indeed we often visited some friends across the borders; and I found very little difference between that part of Georgia and Florida adjoining. The same birds and flowers were seen in both—I mean

both in northern Florida and southern Georgia, where they join. They are both large States, consequently differ much in climate. High mountains in the north of Georgia make it very cold there in the winter; and, on the contrary, that part of Florida which extends so far southward, is warm even in winter—swampy, and fit only for Indians and alligators. For naturalists, however, it abounds in beauty.'

'A jolly good lot of birds and such things. Just the place I should like to go to,' was Duncan's idea.

'What with Indians and alligators and mosquitoes, and heaps of other dangerous creatures, you would soon be driven away, Dunny, I fear.'

'Tell us about the Indians, Aunt Jenny!' cried Freddy. 'Please do.'

'Oh my dear boy, we must put off the Indians until my next visit to England. There are too many of them.'

'Tell us about the other kinds of thrushes, then, Aunt Jenny; won't you?' said Duncan. 'Jim says there are lots of different sorts of thrushes in England. Are there in America?'

'Yes, indeed, there are. Fourteen or fifteen, if I remember rightly. But they were not among my pets; which, you know, were what I agreed to tell you about. And to describe all the different species of thrushes would be as endless a subject as the Indians. For instance, the wood-thrush, the water-thrush, the hermit-thrush, who dwells alone in a solitary place, the cat-bird, the ——'

'Cat-bird! Oh! what sort is that, Aunt Jenny?' interrupted both boys at once.

'It is a rather pretty thrush, which, when alarmed, makes a noise precisely like the mewing of a cat. Indeed, before I knew whence the sound proceeded, I used to look round, fully expecting to see Pussy rubbing herself against a tree.'

'What made the thrush make that funny noise?' Ellie asked.

'When alarmed or angry, most of the thrushes utter a discordant note, quite different from their song. And this mewing sound was the cry of the cat-bird.'

'Could it sing no better than that?'

'Oh yes, Ellie. All the thrushes are musical, you recollect. Ah! here is the summons to tea. I thought it was getting rather late.'

'But, Aunt Jenny!' said Maggie, 'when are we to have that talk about instinct and reason in birds and animals, which you said we should have when Dunny came?'

'If Dunny likes, we can discuss that question the next time we meet.'

Dunny professed himself quite willing to talk over the subject, as it was one which had often perplexed him. 'And afterwards, Aunt Jenny, the ghost story, you know, which Maggie says you saved on purpose for me.' Miss Morton had not forgotten it.

Thus again was a wet afternoon anticipated with a zest far different from the sighs and frowns which had too often greeted those hours 'in-doors,' hitherto found so difficult to occupy.

Depend upon it, my dear young friends, there is nothing like having plenty to do, to make the time pass pleasantly.



CHAPTER XIX.

REASON AND INSTINCT.

NOW then, Maggie, be quick and come. Aunt Jenny is ready. Call Ellie. Come on, Fred! And away ran the two boys, Maggie and Ellie quickly following, and finding Miss Morton already seated in the 'bird chair' (as they had named it), giving her whole attention to Dunny's account of a thrush which he had read about in one of his books, and which had shown so much 'reflection' in sopping a dry crust, too hard to break with his bill, and in picking out the sting of a wasp before swallowing the insect. 'Now that bird must have remembered what kind of fly had a sting, and where to find the sting,' argued Duncan; and he must have recollected that some other hard thing had got soft by being wetted; and perhaps had tried it himself once before, and knew that the water would do the same thing again. And don't you call that reasoning, Aunt Jenny?' cried he in conclusion. 'I do.'

'It is indeed very like reasoning,' replied Miss Morton, as the two little girls seated themselves one on each side

of hér; 'and is a kind of cleverness which, in a human being, would certainly be considered a sign of intellect. One of the chief distinctions between reason and instinct seems to me to be, that dumb creatures possess knowledge—that is, knowledge of a certain kind—without the trouble of working hard to obtain it, as we do. With us, the most talented has to go through a course of training. Many of us have to be taught for years before we become skilful; some of us give up all attempts in a very short time; and the wisest of us cannot hope to know and to do one half we wish; whereas dumb creatures know and do at first, and without any education or practice, all that is necessary for them to know and to do throughout their lives. Who, for instance, would trust a young child among bushes laden with beautiful but poisonous fruit? But birds and animals do not require to be watched and told that such and such food would injure them. Young chicks do not require to be told not to go near the pond, and young ducklings do not wait for permission to go into it, but know the moment they see the water, that they will be safe there, without first taking lessons at the swimming baths, as you do, Dunny. Without education, what a poor figure *we* should make in the world! But a bird or an insect would get on just as well without teachers as with them. Even if, by observing other birds, a robin or a wren learn how to build a nest, it is more than we can do. The same may be said of bees, in making their beautiful cells of wax. Who taught them that no other form than the one they have chosen would so well accommodate

the egg?—cells so nearly round, so closely packed, and yet not one mite of space wasted. Yes, dear children, a bird's nest, a wasp's nest, a spider's web, all convince us that, in some respects, the tiny makers are far cleverer than we can ever hope to be.'

'I am sure *I* could not make a bird's nest if I practised it ever so many years,' said Ellie.

'And yet a little bird can make one when it is only a year old,' replied Freddy.

'Ay,' responded Duncan, 'that's just what Aunt Jenny meant. Birds can do things quite as well the first time as they can ever after, but we can't.'

'And that may be considered another great distinction between reason and instinct. Instinct makes no advances, reason does.'

'No "advances?"' repeated Dunny.

'You all look mystified,' returned Aunt Jenny, smiling. 'I must make that clearer to you. I mean, that because dumb creatures can do things so well at first, they have no need to improve; but we, though ignorant and helpless at first, *can* improve, and by means of our reason *do* improve.'

'Oh yes; now I see,' said Duncan.

'To give an example which Freddy and Ellie can more easily understand, the swallows and thrushes which found their way from a cold to a warm country last autumn were not one bit more clever than the swallows and thrushes which found their way across the seas thousands of years ago; neither have their means of travelling been improved. God gave them then their strong wings, with instinct to

enable them to use them, and wonderful powers of sight to guide them to a country which they had never seen before ; and these means being the best of the kind, they have never needed improvement. But we, not able at first to travel over land and sea, or to discern things afar off, have, by the use of our reason, invented ships, and steam-engines, and balloons, and telescopes, and are always trying to gain fresh knowledge and improve upon our first plans ; and yet, for speed and convenience, have never been able to equal the wings of birds and the fins of fishes. So, while birds and animals have retained what we may call the same manners and customs ever since the creation, we have changed ours continually and improved wonderfully in all these thousands of years. Do you think you understand now what I meant by saying that creatures with instinct do not advance in knowledge, but that creatures with reason do advance ?'

Maggie and Duncan said they quite understood the distinction ; and Freddy, after a little reflection, assured his own mind by aiding his little sister's slower comprehension, for Ellie still looked a little bewildered.

'You know, Ellie, the very first little bird that ever built a nest made a beauty, just as good as that little wren's nest we found last year ; and it knew all about everything then, just the same as wrens do now, because God taught it.'

At which Ellie nodded very sagely, and replied, 'Yes, Freddy.'

'Aunt Jenny,' said Maggie, 'I often think how nice it

would be if our pets could talk to us, so that we could be sure they understood our language. Then they could tell us why they do things, and we could explain to them what we wish them to do. Fuzzy, I am quite sure, understands English perfectly well, and I am sure she feels very sorry and unhappy when she is scolded,—else why should the tears come in her eyes?—and then afterwards how pleased she is when we say, “Good dog, Fuzzy,” and forgive her. So is Ponto. And then when Taffy and Silver-mane ——’

‘Of course horses and dogs understand our language, Maggie,’ cried Duncan, cutting short this list of intelligent quadrupeds; ‘and they know our voices, and know that they must mind what is said to them ——’

‘Which is more than can be said of all two-legged reasoners,’ resumed Miss Morton, smiling. ‘But I think with Maggie, that it would be very delightful to be able to converse with some of our dumb animals, who evince such strong affection for us. That they are guided by *motives* in many of their actions, we cannot doubt,—motives and feelings beyond those mere animal instincts which enable them to feed and protect themselves; but what these motives and feelings are we can never know, since we cannot hold communication with them by means of speech. Also, in addition to those qualities which just now we settled might be considered a sign of intellect, we cannot deny that some birds and animals possess what in a human being would be called virtues. Besides affection for their young, gratitude and attachment to those who are kind to them, some have that sort of conscience which you have

remarked in the dogs. They also display powers of memory, observation, comparison, reflection, caution, perseverance, patience, bravery; in short, most of the human virtues may occasionally be witnessed in dumb creatures of one kind or another,—qualities, too, which it would be well for us, who think ourselves so superior, to imitate more thoroughly. What can be more noble than the devotion of Cæsar to this family and place?—what more amiable than ——’

‘But, Aunt Jenny, Cæsar and Ponto are not always so very amiable,’ interrupted Dunny; ‘and I am sure birds quarrel awfully. You can’t deny but what some birds and animals are vicious. It seems to me as if some of them had more vices than virtues. Ponto is a precious thief.’

‘Oh Dunny, what a shame!’ cried Maggie reproachfully. ‘He is not half so bad to help himself when he is hungry as people are who break into houses and stables—as those wicked thieves did, and stole all papa’s harness and things last winter.’

‘The little sparrows fight for the crumbs because they are so hungry,’ said Ellie.

‘Yes; and that’s why hawks kill little birds!’ said Freddy, who, like Maggie and Ellie, was more ready to excuse than to blame the dumb animals.

‘We are not prepared to decide how far dumb animals are right or wrong according to *our* ideas of right or wrong. We, with our reason, have been taught a higher law to guide our actions; and though dumb creatures display what appears to be some sort of conscience, we cannot

presume to say that they are responsible, as we are. One of the strongest instincts of animal nature is self-preservation ; and it is this impulse chiefly which causes what Dunny calls their vices. For instance : theft, cruelty, tyranny, stealing food when hungry, killing or fighting other animals for prey, or in self-preservation. We, who think ourselves so wonderfully great and wise and good, cannot get on without fighting battles, even inventing all sorts of dreadful instruments to see who can kill each other the quickest—depriving thousands and tens of thousands of human beings of their lives in one single battle ; and that not for food only, and to save ourselves from starving. So we must not condemn dumb creatures who do battle on so small a scale, and for such excusable causes. One thing we know is, that when God made the world, and all things in it, He made every thing in the very best possible way. All that has gone wrong since, was because sin crept into the world. “God saw every thing that He had made, and behold it was very good.” That means perfect in its kind. “All Thy works praise Thee, O Lord ;” that is, that in their very beauty and perfection they prove the wisdom and goodness of the Creator. That was what I meant in saying that birds have required no new inventions. The tools which God gave them at the first were perfect tools, for the purpose of self-protection, and the means of subsistence. Birds need no other telescopes or microscopes than their own wonderful eyes—no other knives or hammers than their own bills—no other means of conveyance than their own wings and

feet—no other traps than those which are in their own mouths—no other——’

Aunt Jenny was here interrupted by all the voices exclaiming at once, ‘Traps in their mouths!’ ‘Knives!’ ‘Hammers!’ ‘How? Oh, do tell us how;’ etc. etc.

‘Why, for a trap some birds are furnished with a long tongue——’

‘Like the humming-birds and the woodpeckers. Oh yes!’

‘A tongue which they dart out with amazing quickness to catch the insects as they fly. Some of the tongues are rough, some are sticky, so that the insects cling there and cannot get away; and the dexterity of the bird is so great, that there is no time for the insect to——’

‘Auntie, you’ve said a hard word!’ whispered Ellie, with her arm round Aunt Jenny’s neck.

‘Yes!’ added Freddy gravely. ‘X— something.’

‘Dex-teri-ty. Skill or quickness of the bird; and neatness in accomplishing—in doing anything. So sharp are the eyes of this kind of bird, so sudden and quick the motion of the tongue as it darts it out and back again, that very few insects can escape. Then there is a trap in the mouth of another bird, which answers better than the cleverest net you could contrive.’

‘Did any of your pets have this net, auntie?’ asked Maggie as Miss Morton paused.

‘No, it was not one of my pets; so I was thinking whether I should tell you about it now, or——’

The children all exclaimed, 'Oh yes!' and begged their aunt to go on.

'Well, it happens to be one of the birds which I had been watching and listening for; and you agreed to have them in their seasons. It is called after the singular note it utters—whip——'

'Whip-poor-will!' whistled Duncan; Freddy imitating him. 'Oh yes, I've read about that. What sort of a trap has it in its mouth, Aunt Jenny?'





CHAPTER XX.

THE WHIP-POOR-WILL.

HERE are several kinds of whip-poor-will in America, and they all belong to a family of birds called goatsuckers. They are also called night-jars, from the notes they utter at night; and another name for them is the night-swallow, because, like the swallows, they feed on insects as they fly. Besides their curious whistle, all the goatsuckers are remarkable for their immensely large, wide mouths, their wonderfully keen sight, and their swiftness of flight. The whip-poor-will flies with its mouth wide open; the trap of which I speak being a fringe of long hair or bristles with which it is bordered, and in which the insects become entangled.'

'Can't the insects see the birds coming, and get out of their way?' Freddy inquired.

'The night-swallows are too quick for them. It is the nature of these birds to feed at night; and as soon as it gets dusk they set off on their flight. Their sight is wonderfully sharp; and when they espy an insect worth pursuing,

they open their enormous mouths and set their trap, and sweep through the air with such astonishing swiftness that the insect is sure to be caught.'

'If I were the flies, I would not stop out so late,' said Ellie.

'But there are some insects which come out only at night; and these the night-swallows like best. God, who gave to these birds the liking for a certain kind of food, gave them also the means of procuring it: eyes to see at night, swiftness of flight, and the network of fringe. Owls, you know, eat bats, both being noc—— Now I am going to tell you a hard word, but it is the only one to suit my story; and as it is the proper word to use here, you must try to remember it.'

'Yes, we will,' cried all four children, giving their whole attention.

'*Noc-tur-nal* is the word. Nocturnal animals are those which rove at night, like tigers and hyenas; nocturnal birds are those which fly and feed at night, like owls and the whip-poor-will and his relations; and nocturnal insects are those which go out only at night, like moths and gnats, and the beautiful fire-flies of which you have heard me speak.'

'Thieves are nocturnal animals, then,' said Duncan; 'for it was in the night that they broke into the stable and stole the harness and things.'

Duncan's wit made Maggie laugh so much that it was some time before Aunt Jenny could help Freddy to pronounce *nocturnal*, which he was trying to do, Freddy being

very ambitious of acquiring long words. 'Did you ever see whip-poor-wills, Aunt Jenny?' he asked, when he had fixed the word in his memory.

'Yes, in Virginia I saw them ; though, on account of their coming out only at dusk, it is not at all easy to get a sight of one ; besides which, they are exceedingly shy birds ; but, after several attempts, I did at last succeed in seeing two or three, and fortunately in being able to watch them.

'For several evenings I had observed a whistle to proceed from precisely the same place at the same time. It was on or near a low fence which separated the garden where I was from a road running along the edge of a field ; so I took my station close by and waited—not moving a finger lest I should alarm the bird and prevent its approach. By and by the loud, clear whistle, "Whip-poor-will," "Whip-poor-will," "Whip-poor-will," repeated many times, faster than you can pronounce the words, told me that the bird was on the other side the fence ; and as I softly crept near to look, it flew off and did not return. The next evening I waited where I could see over the fence. Again the bird came, settling on the ground by the side of the road, but where, unfortunately, the weeds and rubbish prevented my seeing it. I waited very still indeed, hoping it would move ; and at length it did, flying to the top of the fence, and thence over into the garden path, where it recommenced its whistle, remaining there some time, as I knew by the sound. From the path it flew on to the roof of a shed, where it whistled

again, "Whip-poor-will," "Whip-poor-will," dozens of times without pausing. Thus I discovered that it was the same bird which I had so frequently heard in those three places, and not three different birds answering each other, as I had supposed.

'The next night, instead of going to the fence near where the bird always settled first, I sat very still by a bush close to the gravel walk. Soon the note was heard over the fence, then upon the fence, and then, to my delight, close came the bird, whistling, as soon as it settled on the path, loud and shrill, quite unconscious that an intruder was so near. The next minute what should I see but his dear little mate, whom he had thus been calling, come and settle by his side! Then his whistling changed into a soft little happy cooing and twittering, as he hopped to and fro, dancing to his lady-love. Never were birds so proud and happy. They fluttered their wings and kissed each other, and whispered together, and had so much to talk about, that it was quite evident they were agreeing to make their nest together. But by this time it was growing almost too dark to distinguish them, and as I tried to move a little nearer, they both flew off to the roof; and there the clear whistle rang out louder than ever.'

As Aunt Jenny paused, the children, who had listened with breathless interest, now burst out with half a dozen questions. 'How big were they?' 'What colour?' 'Did they come there any more?' and so on.

'For several evenings they went through exactly the same routine. First the male bird was heard in the field,

then in the path where I was waiting to see him, then he whistled till joined by his lady-love, then they danced and twittered and fluttered and whispered together, and at last off they flew to the roof; but where next it was impossible to tell, for by that time it was too dark to see; and there are so many whip-poor-wills whistling in all directions, that you could not say which was which. They were the funniest little birds—very soft looking, with loose greyish or brownish feathers, and such large heads and broad fan-tails. The head seemed nearly half as big as the body, which looked absurdly small between it and the broad outspread tail. They squatted down as low and flat on the ground as a glove which might be dropped. You must recollect that they came out only at twilight, so that I cannot describe them very accurately; and being of a dusky colour, and not very much larger than a swallow, they could not have been seen at all excepting on that flat yellow path or on a fence.'

'How funny of them to come always to the very same place!' cried Freddy.

'Yes, it is the habit of the whip-poor-will to return steadily to the same place again and again. It also regularly roosts in one chosen spot. After I had discovered this, I managed to see another or two, being directed by the whistle; but I was not able to observe any so plainly as the loving little pair on the garden path.'

'What sort of nests do they make?' Duncan inquired.

'They are not good nest-makers. Indeed, they are

generally content with a hollow place in the ground among rubbish. But then they have an advantage in their large mouths which not many birds possess, for they can carry their eggs from one place to another; and if alarmed or disturbed, all they do is just to pick up their eggs and fly off with them to a snugger nest. Two eggs they lay, and each bird carries one; therefore it would not be worth their while to take much trouble in making a nest which they might get tired of, and wish to leave soon after.'

'How funny! Don't the eggs get cold and addled?' asked Maggie, who, having chickens of her own, knew how much care eggs required.

'Does not their great hard bill crack the eggs?' asked Freddy.

'The birds take care not to let the eggs get too cold,' replied Aunt Jenny, 'and are probably not many minutes in choosing a fresh nest. Then, as for cracking them, I ought to have explained that they have not a *great hard bill*, as you suppose, but—for their size—a remarkably small one. You all look surprised; but though their mouth is so enormously big, it is not the *bill*, but what is called the *gape*; that is, that though the bill is small, the mouth itself on each side of the bill is capable of being stretched extremely wide open. In some of your books you will no doubt find a picture of a goat-sucker, then you will see what I mean.'

Duncan said he thought he remembered seeing one in his book of birds, and that he would look for it after tea.

'But, Aunt Jenny, that does not explain things as you do,' he said.

Miss Morton smiled, and said perhaps it was the pleasure of being able to ask questions which made the subject seem more interesting to him.

'Yes; and because you saw the pretty little birdies your very own self,' said Ellie.

'But what makes their bill so soft?' Freddy asked.

'Nay, Freddy, I did not say that their bills are *soft*, exactly; but that they are not very hard, or strong, or large. As their food is soft, and requires no cracking or crushing, most of the goat-suckers do not need a strong bill, but are furnished instead with this wide, gaping mouth and the net-work of fringe, which answer their purpose much better. We see here another instance of the wisdom and goodness of God, in supplying each bird with a bill best suited to his habits. There is a bird called a horn-bill, which also feeds upon insects; so does the woodpecker, you know: but the insects which they prefer live in the bark of trees; so those birds have long, strong, pointed bills to pierce and split the bark, or to pick out the insects hidden there. Other birds, which feed on hard food, such as nuts and kernels, are also provided with hard bills, but short and strong ones, like the grosbeaks, to hammer and crush the nuts; others again, which feed in the water, are furnished with broad, flat bills. You know of what a number of different shapes are the bills of birds: some long and pointed, some long and flat, some short and stout, some straight, some curved, but each shape to answer a different

purpose,—each being, in fact, the very best tool that the bird could have for its own uses—picking up, or lapping up, or catching or dividing its peculiar food.’

‘How very clever God must be!’ said Freddy gravely. ‘He thinks of everything.’

‘He does indeed, Freddy. In every part of the world are living creatures, of all kinds, all sizes, and all habits, each requiring something different to the other, yet each being placed in the home which suits it best. Only Divine love and Divine wisdom could have contrived these things. Only Divine power could have foreseen and arranged everything so that millions and millions of creatures, all having different wants, should all be able to supply those wants by their own means, guided by the *instinct* which God has given to them. The more we examine the works of nature, the more are we convinced of their perfection, and the more are our souls filled with love and reverence for that great and good Being “by whose power all things were created.”’

The children grew quiet and thoughtful while their aunt was thus speaking; and when she stopped, all remained silent but Ellie, who, understanding enough to know that the goodness of God was what they were all thinking about, said:

‘I love God with all my heart for being so kind to the little birds.’

‘Yes; and when, dear children, we think that His love is as great as His wisdom and power, what delight should we not take in serving Him! Which of you can remem-

ber the text which tells us that His love for us is far greater than His love for little birds?’

After thinking a little, Freddy said, ‘God feedeth the—the sparrows——?’

‘The young ravens,’ said Maggie. ‘In the Psalms, Aunt Jenny, it says, “God feedeth the young ravens which call upon Him.”’

‘Yes,’ said Duncan ; ‘and in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus Christ said, “Are ye not much better than they?”’

‘Meaning the sparrows and small birds. Yes ; and David, when thinking of the wondrous things with which God has covered the earth, exclaimed, “All Thy works praise Thee, O God !”—that is, that they are all so beautiful and so perfect, that their very existence proves the greatness of their Maker.’

The children felt their hearts warmed towards God while thinking of the interesting things their aunt had been telling them ; and the next day, when they took their walk, it is surprising what a number of things they all found to talk about and be amused with : such as observing the different forms and actions of the birds they saw—looking to see what shapes the bills were—hedge-sparrows, starlings, a solitary blackbird, and a robin or two. Even the geese on the common became objects of interest ; and Duncan and Freddy, when comparing their mode of walking and of feeding with that of Maggie's chickens, decided that flat bills and webbed feet would be very inconvenient to the hens for scratching among the litter and picking up the grains of corn.



CHAPTER XXI.

SOME NOISY COUSINS.

‘**B**UT why did that funny little bird want poor Willy to be whipped?’ asked Ellie the next time the young party assembled to hear more about the American birds.

‘It did not, of course!’ cried Duncan. ‘Just as if it knew what it was saying!’

‘No. It is only that the whistle *sounds* like those words,’ said Aunt Jenny. ‘There is another in Georgia and the States south of Virginia, a cousin to the whip-poor-wills, called the Chuck-will’s-widow, or Cluck-willy’s-widow. You may fancy it says several things of a similar sound, such as “Willow-willow.” The negroes think it is a sign of bad luck to hear them very close.’

‘And *is* it unlucky, Aunt Jenny?’ asked Maggie.

‘No, dear. But there are possibly some kinds of weather, or of seasons, which induce the whip-poor-will to be less shy than usual; and the negroes have associated some misfortune, which may have befallen themselves at the time, with the whistle which they happened to hear. Ignorant persons often attribute to *luck* things which the

better informed can account for in a very natural way. Thus they also say, that to hear the whip-poor-will is a sign of a fine night. That may be true, and most likely is, because, as the insects on which they feed do not fly about in rainy weather, there is nothing to tempt the whip-poor-will to come out. For with the wisdom—*instinct*, you know—which God has given to birds and insects, is a feeling in themselves which tells them when it is going to rain, so that we, by observing their habits, may sometimes learn of them, and be able to decide about the weather too.'

Duncan and Maggie here recalled the clouds of gnats which they had observed on fine evenings, the web of the gossamer-spider, sparkling like threads of silver over the fields, the swallows flying low before rain, because the insects on which they feed keep near the ground then, and several other signs of fine or of changing weather; and then Freddy asked his aunt if she had seen any more of those whistling night-birds.

'Yes, one more of the same family—a larger bird. But instead of whistling, it utters a sound like the bellowing of a bull; and from this, as well as from its swift and noiseless flight like a bat, it is commonly called the bull-bat.'

'Did you hear it bellow?'

'Yes, often. And at first I really thought it was a bull close by me; and as I was out in the woods rather late and alone the first time I heard it, having missed my way, it frightened me excessively. The whip-poor-will has a way of balancing itself in the air to catch insects;

but the bull-bat dashes at its food, mounting at first very high in the air, and then from that great height swooping down with astonishing quickness, closing its wings, and almost letting itself fall, as if it would be dashed to death, when lo, just as it gets near the earth, it spreads its wings, and sweeps away and up again, bellowing as it dashes past you, and causing you to look round, expecting to see a bull close by.'

'Why does it bellow so loud?' Duncan asked.

'It is thought that the sound is not uttered by the bird itself, but is caused by the wind rushing through its great, wide-open mouth, fringed with bristles, as it plunges down to seize its prey. Certainly the sound is very like the noise you made the other day, Duncan, when swinging round and round the handle of Maggie's skipping-rope so fast, or like anything which you whirl rapidly through the air—a sort of deep, roaring, whizzing sound it is, which you can easily imagine is caused by the bristles in its wide mouth cutting the air as it skims along.'

'It must be very uncomfortable to have that fringe in its mouth,' said Maggie.

'No doubt the bristles can be controlled by the bird—spread or contracted as required.'

'Oh yes; just as pussy can keep down smooth the hairs on her tail, or swell them all out when she is angry.'

'Yes; and as a bird can ruffle its feathers, or put up its crest, and as an insect can manage its feelers, and as some animals can control their whiskers, which are sensitive to the slightest touch. The fringe also answers the purpose

of protecting the throat of the bird. For instance, a large, hard-winged beetle, caught while the bird is in swift motion, might seriously injure the delicate muscles of the throat, were the blow not checked by the bristles. You would not like anything—even a cherry—to come violently into your throat as you were running very fast with your mouth open.'

'Oh no! It might go the wrong way and choke us,' the children exclaimed.

'Besides bruising your throat. But as it is impossible to be very sure of what the bird does where the motions are so rapid, and at night also, we can only suppose it probable that the goat-suckers can control the bristles, and that they do *not* find them "uncomfortable," as Maggie supposes.'

'Aunt Jenny, you so often talk about the birds being "related" to each other; what *do* you mean?'

'Yes, you said a cousin to the whip-poor-will,' added Freddy.

'And being of the same family,' remarked Duncan, 'and yet such different kinds of birds; how can people tell they are cousins?'

'I mean that the whip-poor-wills, the bull-bats, the cluck-will's-widows, and so on, have certain family peculiarities of form or of habit in common with each other, just as we Mortons have all dark eyes and curly hair, and a love of certain things—live pets, for instance—as your father and your uncles have, and as your grandfather had, so that people who knew him say they would know you were a

Morton, even had they never seen you before, because you resemble your ancestors. Thus *naturalists*, or those who have studied the habits of animals, have classed them in families, each distinguished by certain habits or features, though not alike in other respects. Among animals, who can mistake a horse or a dog? And yet how many different kinds of horses and dogs there are! Of the horse family are the zebra, the ass, the mule, and others, all varying in size and colour, yet all liking the same kind of food, and all having certain features alike. So have all cows, so have all cats, so have owls, so have eagles. Now, just as we Mortons have all dark eyes and certain tastes which run in the family, so the goat-suckers have all wide mouths, soft feathers, a liking for insects, and so on. In their habit of going out at night, seeing in the dark, and uttering loud hootings or whistlings, as well as something in their form and plumage, they resemble *owls*, and are therefore said to be *related* to owls, and are called fern-owls; but in their swift flight, their skill in catching insects as they fly, and in some other respects, they resemble *swallows*, and are consequently said to be related to the swallows too, or, as I said, for the sake of helping you to understand family likenesses, are *cousins* to each other. Do you understand now?

‘Yes, auntie, I think I do,’ said Maggie. ‘You said the mocking-bird was cousin to the one the Americans call a robin, because they are both thrushes.’

‘Isn’t it the same as classes and orders in the natural history books?’ asked Duncan.

'Not exactly ; because all birds are of one *class* of *animals*, all fishes of another, all quadrupeds of another. Then the classes are divided into orders, and the orders into tribes : as among animals you speak of the goat tribe, the cat tribe ; and among birds, the thrush tribe, the owl tribe or *family*.'

'And the goat-sucker tribe. Oh yes, to be sure,' cried Maggie. 'And flowers too, Aunt Jenny ; because in one of mamma's gardening books you know it says, "the rose tribe or family." Then all the geraniums go together, and all the ——'

'Ferns !' cried Freddy. 'We can always know a fern by the smell ; and then Aunt Jenny brings it home to find out its proper name in her botany books.'

'I think you have all a tolerably correct idea of tribes now. So just as we are sure of a fern when we find one, even if we have never seen it before, and are sure of a beetle on account of its hard wings, naturalists are sure of a thrush, or a swallow, or a water-bird, as soon as they see one, being able to decide from those peculiar characters or family likenesses which distinguish them.'

'And has the whip-poor-will got any more cousins, auntie ?' asked Freddy.

'Yes, several ; but I did not see them. One seems to say, "Who are you ? Who—who—who are you ?" Another whistles, "Willy, come *go* ! Willy, come *go* !" And one seems to be always laughing at you in a mocking, provoking manner, "Ha-ha ! Ha-ha-ha-ha !" One more of the same family tells you to "Work away ! Work

away!" as if your safety depended on your doing something that very minute.'

'What a noise they must make in the night!' observed Maggie.

'Yes, indeed they do. And a tiresome noise it is to a nervous person, though it is only in very lonely places, and during certain seasons, that you would be likely to hear so many of them. Once a timid traveller lost his way, and was wandering about in a lonely forest all night. He did not know much about the Georgia woods and the Georgia birds; and when he heard all these curious noises, he was so alarmed that he became very ill afterwards, and almost lost his reason. His name happened to be William; and he did not know that it was only the screeching of owls when one seemed to be threatening him with "Willy, come *go*, Willy, come *go*," repeatedly; while another asked, "Who are *you*? Who—who—who are you?" and at the same time a third warned him to "Work away" as if his life depended on it; and a fourth never ceased to jeer at him with the spiteful "Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!" Being an ignorant and easily frightened person, he thought the woods were full of hobgoblins; and as some of the hootings and screechings are very loud and piercing, we can scarcely wonder that the poor man was so terrified.'

'Is that the ghost story, Aunt Jenny?' asked Duncan.

'Well, *no*,' replied Aunt Jenny, smiling. 'Not the one I was thinking of when you asked for one; but you must confess it would almost do for a ghost story.'

The children said it would do capitally; and were so

occupied for some minutes in imitating the hootings and whistlings of fern-owls, that Miss Morton declared she could almost fancy herself in the forests of Georgia, and begged them to stop. Then Maggie said *goat-sucker* was such a strange name for a bird. Did it suck goats?

'It is said that they have been known to do so, and that the goat has been poisoned by them in consequence; but the story is not generally believed. Only the name of *goat-sucker* having been given them long ago, it has now become the one by which they are commonly recognised, and is as much their family name as Morton is ours.'

'Then, Aunt Jenny, Bull-bat and Whip-poor-will will do for their other names, like Jenny, and Freddy, and Percy?' Duncan remarked.

'Yes, almost; only there are many bull-bats and only one Maggie Morton. It is more as if all the bull-bats were the Duncan Mortons and all the whip-poor-wills the Percy Mortons, and so on. Every bird and animal and plant has two names—one of the tribe or family, like *goat-sucker*, *dog*, *geranium*; the other the distinguishing name, as *Esquimaux* dog, *scarlet* geranium, *American* goat-sucker, the name of the bull-bat. The whip-poor-will is called the *vociferating* goat-sucker, which means noisy or loud calling, as it does untiringly; the cluck-will's-widow is called the Carolina goat-sucker, because it was first known in North and South Carolina, before Georgia was inhabited by white people.'

The conversation ended here for that afternoon; and

as the little people ran joyously along the passage and burst into the schoolroom, each imitating a noisy goat-sucker, Miss Bernard looked as much astonished and alarmed as if a whole menagerie of wild animals were coming to take tea with her. And when, after tea, Maggie became the laughing fern-owl, Duncan the bull-bat, Freddy the whip-poor-will and the chuck-willy's-widow by turns, while Ellie cried "Work away" as if not a moment must be lost, and Percy came to unite his voice in chorus, Miss Bernard, unwilling to check their enjoyment, beat a hasty retreat to the library, leaving the supposed goat-suckers in possession of the field.





CHAPTER XXII.

ANOTHER GHOST.

AN unusually fine Christmas, together with the gaieties of the season, left not much time for the bird stories; but when, one afternoon, nearly three weeks after the conversation on goat-suckers, the little party once more reassembled in Miss Morton's room (no other room in the house would have possessed half the charms), the children had not forgotten that the story of the terrified traveller was not *the* veritable ghost story reserved for Dunny, and which now they eagerly claimed.

'For it is perfectly horrid to think how fast the holidays are going!' urged Maggie. 'And Dunny may not have another chance of hearing it.'

Aunt Jenny willingly acquiesced, merely saying by way of preface: 'As your definition of a ghost is "something that comes to frighten people in the middle of the night," this account of another alarm which occurred to me may in part fulfil the requirements, otherwise I fear you will

think it rather stupid. But it is the only *ghost* with which I have ever been personally acquainted, so you must make the best of it.'

Maggie, speaking for the rest, declared they should be sure to like it immensely, 'particularly if it is a ghost which you saw your very own self;' which her aunt assured her was the case.

'You remember the description of my room at Colonel Birnell's. Try to see it in your own minds. The great wide door, with glass all round, that opened on to the piazza opposite the room door; the two funny little passages, terminating in a window; the other window in the corner where the tanager's cage stood, and the strange holes in the wall near the ceiling to let in the air; then there was the closet almost big enough for a bedroom, with more holes in the wall——'

'Aunt Jenny, I would be afraid with so many holes in the wall,' said Ellie.

'Afraid of hobgoblins peeping through? The holes were to let in light and air. Plenty of doors and windows and holes and cracks are to be found in country houses in the hot countries, Ellie; but if you could have peeped through those in my big closet, you would have seen only the piazza and the grove of trees beyond. Only air—no rain—could come in.

'Now, I must tell you that during my stay in the south of Georgia the white people were very much afraid of what they called a "negro rising," which meant the negroes agreeing to assemble together in hundreds to

fight, or rob, or even kill their masters and their masters' families.'

'Oh, Aunt Jenny!' exclaimed Maggie in horror. 'How very, very dreadful!'

'I am happy to tell you that such things were of very rare occurrence, though they did happen occasionally; and you can suppose that on a plantation of many miles in extent, where only a half dozen or so of white people, and those chiefly women, lived in the midst of vicious, untaught negroes—sixty, eighty, above a hundred of them sometimes—it must be a fearful thing for the slaves to arm themselves against their masters.'

'But why *did* they?' Duncan wanted to know. 'I am sure the negroes where you lived were happy enough, and seemed to do just as they liked.'

'Most of Colonel Birnell's servants were contented and happy. But some unwise people had been creating dissatisfaction in the neighbourhood, and persuading the negroes that they were very badly used; so they had been holding secret meetings to make plans to attack the white people and make themselves free. And two or three very bad, idle negroes, belonging to my friend Colonel Birnell, had been known to join those mischievous meetings; so we could not tell what dangers awaited us in consequence, and all the white men within miles kept their guns in readiness for self-defence. Just about that time one of the worst of the negro slaves on our plantation—a half savage—had been flogged for bad conduct, and had threatened to revenge himself. Thus our apprehension was increased,

particularly when Colonel Birnell was obliged to leave home for some days, and Mrs. Birnell and myself were alone in the house with the aunties and the children.'

'And all those savages living close round the house!' exclaimed Duncan. 'I should not much like that.'

'The negroes were not *all* "savages." Only here and there you met a very bad and vicious one. The coachman, the gardener, and several others who lived near the house, were good and faithful servants. Still we could not help feeling a little timid.

'It was one night during Colonel Birnell's absence that I was awakened by the things on my toilet-table being gently moved. The room was too dark for me to distinguish the slightest shadow; but, listening attentively, not stirring a finger, though dreadfully alarmed, I heard the sound of the looking-glass—a creaking of the hinges on the slightest touch, and a jarring of the things standing upon it, owing to the legs not being quite even. There were a couple of drawers in the looking-glass stand, and in these were deposited some trinkets—this gold bracelet, my ear-rings and brooches which I am in the habit of wearing every day, and the things in that tray, which you, Maggie, are so fond of arranging—trinkets which the negroes knew were there, and which I felt sure were now being stolen. I was horribly alarmed; but the thought of losing my valuables was nothing in comparison with the frightful idea of strange negroes being in the house, and we so unprotected. Perhaps that very man who had threatened to be revenged for the punishment he had

received was even now in my room—perhaps some of his accomplices. Who could tell how many, or what their evil tempers might lead them to do? For a few minutes I lay motionless, reflecting whether it would be best to submit to the loss of my valuables and feign to be asleep, or to provoke the thieves to violence by arousing the house. (Don't look so terrified, dear children. This is a *ghost story*, remember; and here is Aunt Jenny safe and sound, you perceive, bracelets and all.)'

'Perhaps it was a mouse!' said Ellie consolingly.

'No. Mice in plenty were often there, and fine frolics they played among the contents of my drawers and boxes; but the movements about the toilet-table were of a different description, more like the sound of garments rustling as if some one were cautiously feeling about for something, or stealthily opening the looking-glass drawers. Then all became still, and I thought the thief must have gone away; yet that seemed impossible without my seeing a shadow pass the window. I had half resolved to find my way into Mrs. Birnell's room, when again I heard a rustling, and felt sure some one was close to the toilet-table. But now, instead of being cautious and stealthy, the movements were so decided and so noisy, that for a moment I thought the thief must be only a rat after all; for rats, as well as mice, made frequent excursions to my chamber. Then the hinge of the looking-glass creaked again, and a peculiar, fluttering sound, as of drapery, convinced me that the intruder was not a rat.'

'Perhaps it was a cat!' again suggested Ellie.

‘No. Cats are not noisy and careless; for, as I listened, wondering and quaking, down tumbled something, and rolled to the floor. The thief has upset a little box. Whoever the visitor might be, he or she was doing things in the most leisurely way, seeming by no means flurried by the accident; and at this my terror somewhat subsided. At last, as the business of ransacking my trinket-cases seemed to draw no nearer to a conclusion, I grew brave enough to ask, “Who is there?” “Is that you, Eliza?” “What do you want?” Questions which elicited not the slightest attention; while the thief proceeded calmly with his investigations, apparently making himself acquainted with every article on my toilet-table. Gradually my alarms changed into anger and annoyance at the audacity of this nocturnal visitor; and suddenly, with a bold resolve to face the intruder, I bounced out of bed, groped for the match-box—always placed in readiness—struck a light, and stared defiantly towards the toilet-table. Not a person—man or woman—was to be seen; doors and windows were just as I had left them; nothing was disturbed, excepting the articles upon the table, and these were displaced, upset, half-emptied, pushed about in a most higgledy-piggledy fashion. Observing these in amazement, and wondering whether spirit-rappers or who could have been playing such pranks with my property, my eyes were attracted by a strange white mass, like a lump of snow, on the top of the looking-glass; and raising the candle to examine what manner of fairy this might be, what do you think I saw?’

'Your night-cap hanging on the top!' 'An owl!' 'A ghost!' 'A kitten!' cried each child in turn.

'No, no, no!' replied Aunt Jenny, laughing merrily. 'In the first place, I don't wear night-caps, Mr. Freddy; but Dunny is nearest. A pigeon! A large white pigeon was perched there; and it was this poor thing strutting about on the table that had caused the disturbance there, and its wings fluttering had sounded like the rustling of clothing. It must have come through one of the holes in the closet, for—the night being rainy and chilly—the door of the piazza happened to be shut.'

'I wonder we did not think of the pigeons, as they came so often into your room!' said Freddy.

'Yes, I wondered I also had not thought of them; but at that time they roosted outside, and had never visited me after dark. Bats often came in the night; so did immense moths, fluttering over my head; and probably, had it not been for the excitement and fears caused by the negro threats, the commotion would not have alarmed me at all, being so accustomed to live company by night and by day. That very Mrs. Pigeon and her friends rarely passed a day without making an excursion to my water-jug, although a pan of water was regularly filled for them on the piazza. After this I was not quite so kind to them; they had presumed upon my hospitality, and had to be driven off.'

'And what did you do to the poor little pigeon?' Ellie inquired.

'Oh, I allowed it to remain on its perch for once, only

opening the piazza door so that it might find its way out as soon as convenient. Thus, you see, both my ghosts have turned out to be live ones, as, I fancy, would be the case with most of the ghosts we hear about, if people only took the trouble to examine them.'

'But they were both white, and so they did very nicely for real ghosts, I think,' said Maggie.

'Then that savage fellow never came, after all?' said Duncan.

'I am happy to say he did not; but that he behaved a great deal better after the disgrace of his whipping had died away. Colonel Birnell told us that some of the other rioters had been caught and punished, which had frightened the rest; so that the negroes were all on their best behaviour for a time. When, on Colonel Birnell's return, I related my night's adventure, he laughed very heartily, and said he should not have left home had there been the slightest danger, and that he would not mind going to sleep with all the doors and windows in the house open, so long as Uncle Will and Uncle Jeff (those were the two who lived close to the house) were on the place; for he was quite sure they would find out if anything were going wrong. So you see that though negro slaves were stupid and troublesome and forgetful, they were often so faithful and attached to their owners, that they were looked upon as friends and protectors in times of danger.'



CHAPTER XXIII.

CONCLUSION.

TRULY, as Maggie had said, the holidays were slipping away at a tremendous pace; and the little party were again counting the days, but not as before, in joyous anticipations of Dunny's return. 'Only four more days for Dunny to be with us!' was now their lament. 'Only four more happy evenings!' Then: 'Only three days, and yet we have such lots to do!' And at last, 'Oh, Aunt Jenny, this is Dunny's very last day at home, and we have not heard all the bird stories yet!' 'Nor about the Indians!' added Freddy. 'We did so want you to tell us something about those Indians that have feathers stuck up straight on their heads, and ——'

'Ay, those chaps that have such queer names,' echoed Duncan, 'and take scalps. Regular savage fellows they are, too.'

'What *are* scalps?' asked Freddy.

'A part of the skin of the head with the hair on it,' replied his brother. 'And the savages keep it as a trophy of victory.'

'But what is *trophy* ?'

'Oh, bother! I can't stop and explain it now; I must go and finish my tool-box before dark. There will be no time to-morrow.'

Freddy was turning to ask his aunt about scalps and trophies, but could not resist his brother's 'Come on, Fred.'

'Perhaps Aunt Jenny will tell us about the Indians this evening. Will you, auntie?' said Freddy.

'Oh, I vote for some more about birds,' interrupted Dunny. 'If there's any time at all, I want to know about the jays and that other kind of thrush. So let's be quick and finish the tool-box first.'

'Yes, let's,' echoed Fred; and away they ran.

Aunt Jenny nodded and smiled, and said, 'We'll see;' but when they were gone, remarked to Maggie—who was helping her refurnish Dunny's desk — 'I am afraid we shall have to postpone the rest of the bird stories till some future time. Dunny forgets the games we have promised the little ones to-night.'

'Easter, Aunt Jenny! Perhaps Easter! Oh, and that will be something to look forward to! *Do* you think you will be here at Easter? I mean, *do* you think papa and mamma won't come home before Easter? Oh, I don't know whether to be glad most to see dear papa and mamma again, or sorry most to lose *you*, dear, *dear* Aunt Jenny!' And poor little Maggie buried her face in her aunt's lap, and fairly began to cry.

'Look up, my pet, and I will tell you a secret.'

Maggie raised her face in eager curiosity, smiling

through her tears ; for she well knew that Aunt Jenny's secrets were sure to mean pleasure of some kind.

Then Miss Morton, in a low, shy voice quite unusual in her, and with a soft, pretty colour stealing all over her face and neck while she spoke, making her eyes bright as if with inexpressible happiness, whispered to Maggie that in the spring some one was coming across the Atlantic to take her back to America for a long, long time ; but that Maggie's papa and mamma had promised that she and Dunny, and Freddy and Ellie, should all go with her to London first ; and then—then—in the Easter holidays, Maggie was going to be 'bridesmaid to—to—somebody. Could she guess whom ?

'You—you—you, *darling* Aunt Jenny !' cried Maggie, nearly squeezing all the breath out of her aunt's throat in the rapture of her embrace. 'Oh, how——!' But Maggie did not say 'how' *what*, for her heart was too full to finish her sentence. Neither could her aunt find words for a minute or two. But when both had recovered themselves a little, Miss Morton resumed :

'But there is something else for you to hear ; and this part we will tell Dunny before he goes back to school. He is to spend his Easter holidays in London, where we are to meet your papa and mamma ; and then I shall take you all to the Crystal Palace and the Zoological Gardens, where you will see birds of all kinds ; and also to the British Museum, where are immense numbers of stuffed specimens ; and among them we shall be sure to find some like those we have been talking about.'

This was indeed such delightful news, that Maggie was for running off that instant to let the boys share her joy. But her aunt said, 'Would it not be better to keep it till quite the last, as it would cheer Dunny up capitally, while he was all alone in the train?' And the little girl thought so too, and bottled up her impatience. And it did 'cheer Dunny up.' He had never been to London (neither had any of the children) to stop any time, and had been long looking forward to this great event. Easter came early that year; and when once Maggie and Freddy had settled down to their lessons again, the weeks flew by almost as quickly as those of the holidays had done.

Maggie kept her secret famously, though many a little talk had she in private with her aunt about this new uncle that was to be. And when the time came for his arrival, and for the return of Mr. and Mrs. Morton, and for the happy meeting in London, then it became a secret no longer; for the preparations for the wedding were going on before everybody's eyes, and everybody was busy with dressmakers, and milliners, and tailors, and jewellers, and all sorts of people.

But there were days set apart for the Crystal Palace, and the Zoological Gardens, and the British Museum, for all that. And the 'new uncle,' as they all called him, accompanied the children to those places; and he told them so many amusing things about America, and explained so delightfully about all the things they saw, that they thought he was nearly as good as Aunt Jenny at 'story-telling,' and wished heartily that he was not going

back to America at all ; and especially that he would not carry Aunt Jenny away !

As for the wedding, no doubt many of my young readers would like to hear about that, and to know how Maggie was dressed as a little bridesmaid ; but that you must all imagine for yourselves. Mrs. Morton returned from Mentone 'as strong as ever' again, and all went off well, excepting when the time for parting came. But that we won't think about just now. A promise had been exacted of the newly-married pair to visit England again in a couple of years, should it please God to spare them.

And the very last thing which the children shouted out, just as the train was starting from the Euston station, was — 'And be sure to bring the mocking-birds, dear Aunt Jenny. And *lots* more stories to tell !'



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